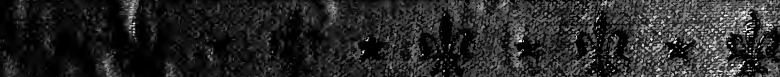


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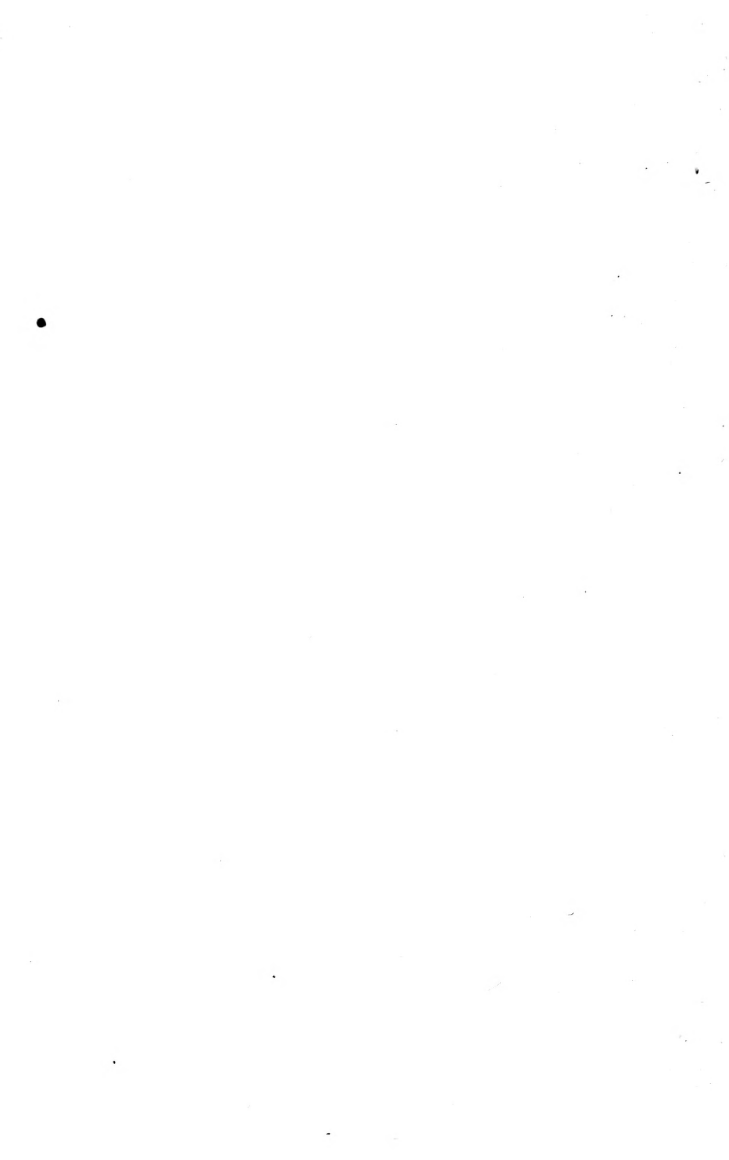
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SCOTCH MARRIAGES

II.

SCOTCH MARRIAGES

BY

SARAH TYTLER

AUTHOR OF

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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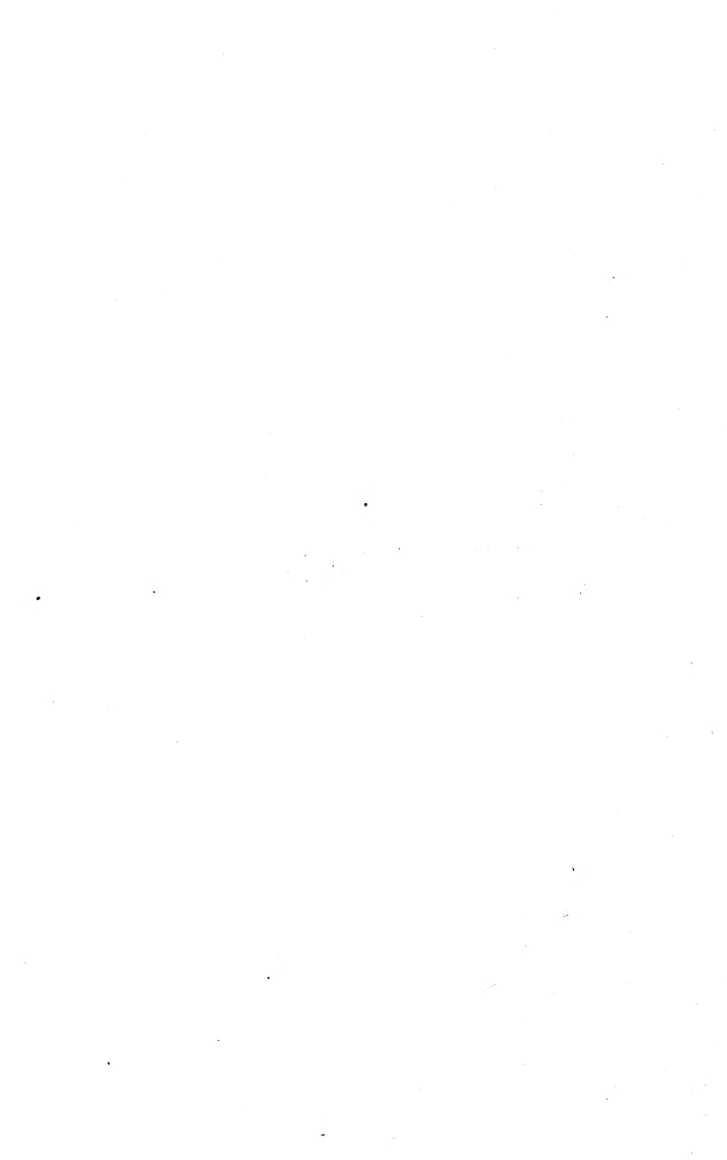
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HARRY BA'FOUR'S
ELOPEMENT



CHAPTER I.

HARRY BA'FOUR.

HARRY BA'FOUR sat supping his porridge and milk and studying a plea, a clause for every spoonful, in his private room in his house in the Old Town of Edinburgh. Harry emptied his bowl—more correctly his wooden 'cap'—of porridge and milk every morning as regularly as he emptied his 'tappit hen' of claret, in good company, at his own particular tavern every evening. And he made the first performance the accompaniment of the final preparation of his work for the day, as a schoolboy with a conscience gives a last glance over his previously learnt lessons while he munches his buttered roll and

drains the contents of his coffee cup. Though the ostrich-like capacity, physical and mental, of youth ought to have been long passed with Harry, neither his digestion nor his judgments—for his place was among the Daniels of the Bench—suffered in consequence of his daily practice. Harry Ba'four was one of the mighty men of a former century, those giants of the old Scotch Law Courts with whose feats—gastronomical, bibulous, intellectual—readers are familiar. His decisions were so full of natural sagacity and acquired learning—massive yet not cumbrous, like the man himself—that they have passed into wise sayings in his profession, and linger in the form of unanswerable precedents in the grand, hoary Parliament House where his bodily presence—a magnificent physique—once fitly figured.

Harry was sixty years if he was a day, yet his muscular strength was little impaired, while the grasp of his mind and the fire of his heart

were still less abated. He sat there, big, sound, fresh, and warm at the core, little worn by time or work, or that worry and faint-heartedness with the disappointments of life, which are the greatest destroyers of all. His capacious forehead, at the present moment unshadowed by a wig of any kind, was made still more prominent by its baldness. His eyes looked out keenly, while they were apt to twinkle and melt, as a condition of their penetration. His large expressive mouth was mobile instead of coarse, his solid chin doubled itself literally and genially so as to double not only the work but the pay of Harry's humble crony the barber. Harry Ba'four was a man of stately presence, with the stateliness no more injured by the homeliness of his meal than the fineness of his cambric frills suffered from their contact with the old snuff-brown coat which he used by way of dressing-gown. In a button-hole of the coat he wore a common garden daisy with the dew still

trembling on it, for, early as the morning hour was, Harry Ba'four had taken his morning walk still earlier. These were the happy days not only of morning walks, but of country fields and cottage gardens in easy proximity to the town.

Harry Ba'four's primitive room was little better than a closet fitted up with book-shelves laden with volumes in calf, shabby from use, dog-eared, pulled about, lying face downwards, a ragged and battered regiment in full discharge of its duty. His single table, squeezed into its place, was groaning under its burden of law papers, among which it had required some care and skill on the part of the particular serving lass in attendance to introduce the master's porridge cap without doing damage. Harry's chair, the only valuable article of furniture in the room—and it was without much value in those days, a high-backed richly-carved oak chair with a faded cut velvet cushion, which

might have been abstracted from the neighbouring palace of Holyrood, was planted heavily on the shabby strip of carpet, and so wedged between the book-shelves and the table that the judge might have his books at his elbow while his papers were at his finger ends. There were many spacious, even nobly proportioned rooms in the old High Street house of gentle antecedents, but these were consecrated to the use of members of the family who were people of more consequence in the house than its master. For that matter, Lord Balfour deferred to his son and daughters with a voluntary humility—half chivalrous, half belonging to a strain of weakness in his character. However, he was not only fain to submit to having a closet for a study, in that age of superb indifference to space, air, and light, he remained perfectly satisfied with the limited dimensions of his den. He was innocently persuaded, not merely that a closet was the proper style of room for a study,

but that his closet was the snuggest and most convenient owned by any judge or lawyer in Edinburgh.

It is a notable point in the idiosyncrasy of Harry Ba'four that while he had risen to the honours of a judge, wore his Majesty's ermine, was formally addressed on the bench as my lord, and invested at other times with the title of Lord Balfour, which he had earned for himself, he remained Harry Ba'four with old and young, gentle and simple—to his face in the case of his companions and social equals, barely behind his back in the mouths of his juniors and retainers, universally on the tongues of the public and the mob. It is even said that a prisoner whom Lord Balfour had never seen before, and on whom he had just passed sentence, addressed to him a piteous appeal for mercy in the familiar terms, 'Oh ! Harry Ba'four, will ye no grant me grace ?' And that the judge, in place of standing aghast at the unheard-of liberty, turned aside overcome by the

brotherliness of the adjuration, and with difficulty restrained his desire to set his own finding aside, and so defeat the ends of justice. The practice, far from having anything to do with a slight to Harry Ba'four's claims, was an integral part of his peculiar fame and favour. It cannot be said that the feature in Harry's character which produced this intimate connection with his fellow-creatures bore no base fruit of contempt in the contemptible, of discontent and disapproval in the narrow and formal. But it may be asserted that in all those men and women of a past generation who rose above petty definitions and restrictions, and who had any largeness and tenderness of nature, Harry Ba'four's broad—accessibility shall we call it? his intense humanity—exceeding even his genius and learning, kindled a deeper and more lasting enthusiasm.

But Harry himself, in his partial consciousness of that side of his mental constitution which distinguished him specially from the mass

of his fellows, and in which lay alike his greatest strength and his utmost weakness, felt affronted at his own eccentricity. In the humility of his gifts, he counted certain qualities and propensities to be struggled against and hidden from observation. He knew that his grown-up children, who resembled their dead mother and were not like Harry—his son, Mr. Hendrie Balfour, who had not been called ‘Harry’ from the time he was in his cradle, Miss Kirsten and Mrs. Weir, who had returned to her father’s house a widow, and fallen back on his bounty to support her and her children—each condemned unconditionally the judge’s unconquerable frankness and friendliness, his rash, boyish impulses, his outbreaks of feeling and escapades in action, his very penitence for the oddities which helped to constitute him a humourist, and caused Edinburgh to ring with good stories of his mad pranks (at sixty!) quite as much as with the wisdom of his deliverances.

It is hard upon a man to be painfully conscious that he is capable of scandalising his own children. Probably it is doubly hard, though it ought not to be so, when the offence is the result of some ineradicable constitutional vagary of which he cannot get rid—rather than of a wilful lapse from the path of virtue. For, as to the last, Harry Ba'four, the great lawyer and judge, was acknowledged unanimously to be an honest man and a worthy gentleman, who in an age of few scruples and many excesses had kept his heart wonderfully uncorrupted and his hands exceptionally clean. But all the more Harry hung his head for his foibles before his own prudent and proper offspring, before his very servants. The last were chosen by Miss Kirsten, the mistress of the household, and under her rule, the plague of the small self-righteousness and petty intolerance had spread. The servants were guilty of pitying their master in a scornful way and even of bearing a grudge

against him because he did not always keep the appointed domestic hours, clothe, feed, and generally conduct himself according to strict precedent, but would occasionally let dinner or supper wait, omit some time-honoured ceremony, make a mistake about a vest or a pair of knee-breeches, or, gravest of all offences, inconsiderately intrude upon the high-mightinesses of his household, at the most inconvenient season, a poor relation, an unlucky acquaintance, a visitor of less than no account. Then Harry would strive to atone for the enormity with a shame-facedness and meekness which tempted ungenerous, coarse-grained natures to insolence.

There was one exception to the mingled severity and carelessness with which the idol of the Edinburgh courts and closes was treated under his own roof. This exception was the confidential clerk, Gillespie, whom Harry—it may be in an instinct of self-defence—insisted, with

a determination unusual in him in his family life, on keeping in the establishment. Harry himself—not Miss Kirsten—had selected Gillespie, a red-haired raw-boned, awkward man, with some legal talent, who was devoted to his master. Harry and his ugly familiar could hardly be said to make common cause against the rest of the family, seeing that the judge did not acknowledge any conspiracy against him, and the clerk was so true to his master that he followed suit in this as in all else, ignoring for Harry's sake the special indignities that fell to his own share as only Harry's spoilt factotum. Not the less did Gillespie secretly resent the under-valuing of his master. 'The grandest judge, the best man in the ceety or the kingdom,' Gillespie was wont to say to himself in a white heat of wrath ; 'to think he should be hadden doun and treated like a laddie or a fule, till he cannot say his lugs are his ain—by Master Hendrie and a wheen wemen' (Gillespie was a confirmed bachelor as

well as something of a misogynist) ‘and a doited deevil of a serving man!’ He referred in those disparaging terms to the dull pompous butler on whom Miss Kirsten set such store as exactly what a servant should be; while Harry and Gillespie lived on terms of the most perfect confidence and unassailable regard.

It was Gillespie who now, without any further intimation of his presence, stuck his shock, red head and freckled face into the study and announced, ‘A frien’ for ye, Lord Ba’four.’

‘Hout! what nonsense, Gillie,’ exclaimed Harry unceremoniously, as at a privileged but baddish jest, while he paused in the act of transmitting a spoonful of porridge to his capacious mouth and a clause of the plea to his equally capacious memory. ‘Ye ken—all the world kens—I must be at the House within an hour. Who should disturb me at my breakfast?’

‘It is not who should disturb your lordship,

it is ane has disturbed ye,' corrected Gillie pragmatically.

'Well, ane must go farther.' Harry stood up for his right to take his meal and look over his papers in peace, spooning away vigorously as he spoke.

'It's a 'oman, man,' Gillie took it upon him to remonstrate in a friendly fashion.

Harry hesitated, then said—almost irritably for him, while he plied his spoon again doggedly—'I cannot help that. I'm sure none kens better than you, Gillie, that this Murdoch case on which I am to sit is to be called first. Tell the honest woman that she must go a bittie farther. There's Charlie Carmichael, a clever lawyer and not a bad chield, in the next close, may do her business.'

'It's a led dy,' said Gillie again.

'All the better,' said Harry, brightening as he hardened in his resolve and polished his cap. 'No doubt she has a purse to fee a lawyer for

his gab. A fine lady will find no want of advocates.'

'She's an auld frien', Gillie announced at last, and added with a sudden emphasis, 'Div ye think I would have ye disturbed on the morning of the day of the hearing of the Murdoch case for ony other body? It's Mistress Hyndford.'

'Ailsie Hyndford, poor lassie! You auld sorry, why did you not tell me sooner?' cried Lord Balfour, starting up from his seat with a vehemence that overturned the empty cap. 'Show her in this minute. To keep her waiting at the door as if she were not as free of my room as ony bairn I have!'

'He's cleaned out his cap, ilka curran', Gillie congratulated himself cunningly, as he departed on his errand. 'Now, he would have left his breakfast half-eaten and him with the Murdoch case to hear, and fasted till his twal'-hours, if I had not kept back Mistress Hyndford's name to the last. He has naebody to look

after him but me. His clachters and Maister Hendrie are ower ta'en up wi' themsels—which points the differ between the great and the sma'—to see to and make o' him; and Harry needs to be seen to and made o'.'

In spite of the open sesame to Mrs. Hyndford which Lord Balfour's words had conveyed, as he stood waiting to receive his friend, an air of embarrassment stole over the man's frank, courteous bearing, in sympathy with what he anticipated would be the embarrassment of another. 'Poor Ailsie,' he thought, 'she must have come on the old errand, and it is hard on her proud spirit.'

CHAPTER II.

HARRY BA'FOUR'S FRIEND.

GILLESPIE showed in a lady young enough to be Lord Balfour's daughter—indeed she had been the contemporary and companion of Kirsten Balfour. Still the stranger was long past her youth, with such evidence of wrecked hopes and a wasted life in the deep-drawn lines of the face and the dark hair thickly sprinkled with grey as would make thirty-eight read like fifty years any day. The fire of a pair of brilliant eyes, and something of lingering sweetness in the mouth—pinched and dragged as it was—survived the destruction of what might have been the original personal attractions, just as the air with

which Mrs. Hyndford's extremely shabby *mode* cloak and widow's bonnet were worn remained the unmistakable air of a gentlewoman.

'I am very glad to see you, Ailsie,' said Lord Balfour, advancing to meet her with earnest kindness. 'It is a long time since we have met.'

'It is not long—at least so I have been thinking as I walked along,' she said hurriedly, with an evident effort to subdue the rising agitation which yet vibrated in a voice that was by nature clear and full. 'It is not long to come a score of times with the same tale; and do not say you are glad to see me, Lord Balfour,' she added with some bitterness, 'when your knowledge of the world will tell you what brings me here again.'

'At least, Ailsie, permit me to be glad that you come to me in your straits,' he soothed her gently.

'And how do you think I must feel to come

begging and sorning on the man who warned me well beforehand what would be the upshot of my marriage—the man whom Willie Hyndford—both the Willie Hyndfords, had the bad grace to mock and defy, while they have become resigned to take an awmous from him at the last ?’ she ended, with sharp scorn of herself and others.

‘Whisht ! Whisht ! Ailsie,’ said Harry Ba’four, distressed and abashed as if he himself had been the wrong-doer, ‘you were always hot and rash,’ he went through the form of rebuking her. ‘If I am content to let bygones be bygones, why need you rake them up when it can do no good ? Nay, you must sit there,’ forcing her into his seat, the only chair in the room, and standing looking down on her kindly, a smile breaking like sunshine through the cloud on his face and spreading quickly over it. ‘Do you not mind how you and Kirsten would steal into this room twenty or thirty years since, when you

were "wee white-headed Ailsie," not over six or seven years old? and a fearless, saucy little mistress you were, I can tell you. You would get into my chair and call it your seat. Once I found you half smothered in my wig and gown which I had brought home and thrown down, and pretending to send poor Kirsten, who was never up to your tricks, to be banished beyond the seas on your single word, without your even having the trouble to charge a jury.'

'It should have been all the other way,' said Ailsie Hyndford, moving restlessly and sighing deeply; but smiling a little, too, at the recollection of old times. The smile brought out a faint reflection of the arch sweetness which had once been the crowning charm of her handsome, spirited face.

When he had, as he thought, ingeniously recalled her to the footing she had formerly held in his family, he tried to approach delicately the object of her visit, knowing their

time was short. ‘You spoke of two Willie Hyndfords in trouble; your son, the second Willie, cannot be that length yet, Ailsie?’ he suggested anxiously, as if sin and sorrow were a question of years.

‘He’s up to his neck in debt and difficulties, Lord Balfour,’ she answered, with a stern brevity that did not hide the anguish of the confession. ‘He’s but a lad of eighteen years, but he has riven his father’s bannet already. The first Willie—my cousin—who was kenned far and wide as “wild Willie Hyndford” when I loved him and married him against the will and pleading of every friend I had—one would think that he had earned his name as far as drinking and dicing and brawling went. And I could not win him from his evil ways,’ she put in a pathetic parenthesis, with her eyes growing wistful, ‘as I was vain enough to think, though their end—ruin and an untimely grave—stared him in the face from the beginning. I can speak of it quietly

now,' she began again, 'for it has been all over, and poor Willie, whom I was so fond and fain to wed in the teeth of every one of you—and I would do it again,' she cried out in her vehement candour, 'if I were but young and light of heart, and scant of wit and strong of will once more—wae's me! he has been past harming me, gone to his account these ten years. But the second Willie is his father over again,' she continued excitedly and a little wildly, as if her mistakes and misfortunes had touched her brain. 'He has gone farther than his father ever went, and him only eighteen,' she broke off piteously. Then she started from her seat and caught her old friend by the arm. 'The Willie Hyndford you knew, the Willie who was my first foot and valentine and partner, the gallantest lad, the finest fellow—you mind?—in the whole town if he were also the wildest—he never committed an act that might send him across the seas at his country's expense. In your ear,

my Lord do not make me speak aloud our disgrace.'

She whispered a sentence which he stooped down to hear.

He started back aghast and outraged. 'The young scoundrel! The shameless, abandoned young villain!' he protested, before he could remember to whom he was addressing the words.

She turned upon him in a moment, and stood at bay in defence of the criminal, her eyes—their apparent size increased by the hollowness of her cheeks—blazing, her thin white face flushing with the hectic, wavering crimson which passion brings into the faces of the old and the spent. 'How dare you say such words in my hearing?' she demanded furiously. 'Do you know whom you are speaking to, Harry Ba'four? He's my son, my only bairn, who slept in my arms and said his prayers at my knee, and if his mother is not to stand up for him—even at a higher judgment-

seat than yours, if she be permitted—to whom should a man look for mercy?’

‘Softly, softly,’ he sought to calm the wretched mother. ‘But why have you told me this, Ailsie Hyndford?’ Lord Balfour began to object on his own account, walking about as far as the space would permit him in great perturbation. ‘You ken my office—you know it is against my duty and my honour alike to become, even unawares, the listener to a guilty tale and not give up the guilty man to the law’s just vengeance, which he has richly merited.’

‘You will not do it,’ she said, growing more composed rather than falling into a panic at his words. ‘You would not betray my confidence though that seat were a throne and you wore a king’s crown and mantle instead of a judge’s wig and gown. I have not known you all these years—since I played about your feet and hung on your neck like one of your own bairns, as you have reminded me, Harry Ba’four—for

nothing. Besides, what have you in your power except to repeat a half-demented widow-woman's story? You have not a grain of proof. Can you not guess a miserable mother had craft enough to think of all that beforehand?' she asked, almost in a tone of triumph, with one of the rapid changes of a highly-strung nature, on which each wave of feeling, each throb of impulse, told forcibly and showed vividly. 'You do not ken Willie's place of hiding; you could not find him though you tried.'

In the next instant her whole aspect and speech underwent another transformation—she was the humble suppliant, the piteous pleader. 'Oh, have mercy!' she implored again, her eyes brimming over with sorrow, her knees knocking together in her misery, her arms extended in an agony of appeal. 'Think how young he is—a mere laddie, who should have been at his lessons and games, his Latin and golf. If you condemn him to perdition, what good will it do, save to

serve as an example, which no lost spirit like his will heed, and no steady chield needs. Shall I go down on my knees to you to give him another chance in another land where neither he nor his father is known? He is so young his hot blood may cool, he may think better of what is due from him, and grow a worthy man yet. He may live happy and die respected, with greeting bairns round his bed, long after you and me, Harry Ba'four, are lying in the mools.'

Her auditor could not find it in his heart to shake his head in denial, to demolish her last forlorn hope. He had undergone a struggle with his sense of a judge's duties. But the man in Harry Ba'four waxed stronger than the judge. Though he was destined to go down to posterity as a great lawyer, he was no Brutus to sentence his own or his friend's child. And the man did not see that there would be much gain to society at large by the arrest and

punishment of Willie Hyndford, or any other culprit equally youthful and as much left to himself—always supposing that Harry Ba'four could arrest and punish the lad, not drive him mad by the prospect of his exposure, and tempt him to murder as the last ghastly resource to hide his infamy and revenge his ruin.

Harry Ba'four quickly penetrated that all the help which Mrs. Hyndford sought was the money to enable her son to quit the country of his own accord. And the sum she named reluctantly was so small that Lord Balfour felt compelled to conclude that she must be stripping herself in order to make up the necessary amount.

‘But what will you do yourself, Ailsie?’ he ventured to hint ruefully as he took from the bureau the banknote she desired, which he dared not make larger, and gave it to her. ‘That loon Willie should have thought of you

before he came to this pass—I may say that without incurring your displeasure.'

'My lord,' she put him off with a pathetic echo of the gaiety he remembered well, 'you have a head bald by time as well as powthered by Jock Howie the barber, you are one of the King's judges, and not the least in the House—else folk lie. You must have found that we reverse the commandment, it is the fathers and mothers who honour their children and not the children their parents. There is a story of a bird—of the vulture kind, think ye?—that fed its young with its heart's blood. Would you—and you a father yourself, have a woman with a soul to be saved, less devoted than a bird of prey, or do you deny me a woman's first right? Do you not ken I would blithely ware my heart's blood on Willie, if that would save a hair of his head? For anything further I'll do well enough—have no fear for me. You'll notice I do not promise to pay back the note, though

you ken I will, if I live. At the same time, both you and I are well aware that I owe you a debt neither silver nor gold can discharge, which, unless my prayers on my knees night and morning can make good, I must carry on my conscience to my dying day.'

He could do nothing more with her than draw from her with difficulty her present address and let her go.

That day in the celebrated Murdoch case, though Harry Ba'four gave it scrupulous attention, and made the notes which anticipated his summing up with his usual astuteness, there was an absence of the natural heartiness and humour which distinguished the man quite as much as his legal ability. There was a burden on Harry's mind which he could not shake off, though he was not at liberty to let his thoughts stray. He was fond of his profession, loved the grand old Parliament House, had no end of allies and satellites within its bounds, and was

in the habit of playing his part in the centre of the strong currents of human feeling and dramatic interest which circulated there, manfully, with a zest which never palled. Truth to tell, the Parliament House was more like home to Harry than his own house had ever been, tender as the strong man's heart was. But this day he was fain to get away from the manifold claims of the national law court, and to withdraw with his pained heart and troubled mind to the refuge of his own house in the High Street.

If the grace of peace was not to be found at Harry's board, it had few other graces. The dining-room of the old Edinburgh lawyer was grim enough, with its items of sombre family pictures destitute of artistic merit, homely drugget under foot, straight-backed chairs, black with age but not rendered easy by use, ranged in unbroken lines, and a sideboard like a huge coffin or fiddle-case raised on four slender legs. The very table, covered with table-linen from

the late Mrs. Balfour's 'providing' remarkable rather for strength than fineness, bore ampler testimony to Miss Kirsten's renowned regard for economy than to any luxurious hankerings or foreshadowings of æsthetics which might have strayed as far as the Northern Capital. The soup plates were of common white earthenware, the scanty array of glasses were of thick coarse crystal, and the family plate was so dim and battered because of the very respect with which it was treated, which forbade all dangerous burnishing and repairing, that it might have been pewter for any lustre it lent to the meal on which it bestowed its disfigured countenance.

Miss Kirsten sat at the head of the table opposite her father. Mr. Hendrie and Mrs. Weir confronted each other at the two sides; while the dessert of wizened apples, wooden-like pears, and mouldy nuts would bring with it Mrs. Weir's two lanky, lantern-jawed boys and her one pale-faced, light-eyed little girl.

But first the barley broth and the neck of mutton, the pair of mature hens instead of spring chickens, and the haddocks which appeared then at the same stage of the banquet, were eaten in what Harry soon became guiltily conscious was ominous silence. He roused himself from his reverie, fidgeted, and addressed himself with laborious—absolutely painful—solicitude to please each member of his family in turn.

He tried Miss Kirsten, a gaunt woman sitting very upright in her scoured silk gown, brown gauze turban, and mittens, on the intrinsic qualities and the price of fish, and whether the fowls before him had come from his own farm and patrimonial inheritance of Lammer Law, or had grown to middle age in some more prosaic locality.

He mildly assailed Mr. Hendrie, a stiff superannuated young man whose hair, now that powder was going out of fashion, was brushed into a top and had by nature the ashen-coloured

tint which looks grey to a casual observer, while his green coat, ruffles, and pumps were finically correct. The judge sought to draw from the advocate an opinion on the course of the Murdoch plea, the further hearing of which had been adjourned till the following day. Mr. Hendrie's reputation for profound wisdom by no means equalled his dogmatism of tone, and he had a small practice for an advocate in spite of his father's popularity, so that his views were hardly worth the trouble of extracting, unless as a mark of paternal regard.

Lord Balfour asked Mrs. Weir what her children had been about. Mrs. Weir was a peevish edition of Miss Kirsten in the formidable old widow's weeds which encased the head in a lawn helmet, and the arms to the elbows in armlets of broad-hemmed cambric 'weepers.'

The judge's efforts, though he was popularly held to be a man of fine conversational powers,

proved all in vain on this occasion. He only received in return a succession of monosyllables, dry from Miss Kirsten, slightly supercilious from Mr. Hendrie—though to do him justice he intended no direct disrespect to his father—and reproachfully lugubrious from Mrs. Weir.

Harry suspected what had come to pass, that Mrs. Hyndford's early visit to him had got wind in the household. He saw that his family were arrayed in strong opposition to him, and he knew what was impending over his devoted head the moment Ritchie the butler's back was turned. For much as Miss Kirsten and the others approved of Ritchie's solemn decorum, they were by no means inclined to trust him with family grievances, as Harry took Gillie into his confidence.

There was a curious half-humiliating vein of poltroonery—shall we call it?—in stout old Harry Ba'four where his children were concerned, though he was dubbed 'the Scotch

Lion'—he roared so patriotically on occasions, and was a bold reformer of abuses, an unflinching maintainer of the right as he saw it. He not only quailed at these people's implied displeasure, he caught at any idle chance which should defer the evil hour of explanation. He called little Isobel Weir on her introduction by her nurse to stand by his knee while he sipped his claret. He had suffered much disappointment, both unconfessed and confessed, in children. He was aware at the bottom of his heart that his own children had no sympathy with him, while he was always telling himself that he was well off in Hendrie, who, though he might not be a Solomon, yet carried an old man's head on a young man's shoulders, and had never got into a foolish scrape in his life—which was more than his father could say—and in Kirsten and Isobel, who were douce lasses. Isobel, poor thing, could not help losing her feckless man—there had been no ill in him, though

there had been as little good—and coming back to murmur over her hard lot and ‘bicker’ in an uncomfortable way with Kirsten and Hendrie for her and her bairns’ share of their father’s hearth. That was all in the natural order of things. It had not been quite so much a matter of course that Harry should endure another and perhaps a still more cutting disappointment in an adopted child who had been his ward and cherished darling for a time. Yet Harry Ba’four remained fond of children. He wished now to take this fatherless little lass to him. He called her his Bonniebell. He proposed to tell her his very best child’s story of a brownie and a fairy, while he cut her apple for her into the representation of a bishop’s mitre.

But little Isobel Weir pulled herself fretfully away from the encircling arm of her grandfather. She complained in an aggrieved tone that he ‘towsed’ her hair. She asserted that

her right name was Isobel, and she did not like to be called by any other. She announced that she did not care for a story which was not true, since there were no such creatures as brownies and fairies—Uncle Hendrie said so. Finally, she objected that her grandfather was wasting her apple, which was for eating not for carving on, as Aunt Kirsten would tell him.

Repulsed and set at naught even by this baby, Harry shrank into his shell, and awaited the onslaught without laying hold of any other straw to avert the catastrophe.

Miss Kirsten led the charge with an indignant wave of her mittened bony hand. ‘Can it be possible, father, that Ailsie Hyndford has had the face to come to you again with her stories?’ she demanded.

‘Whom should she come to if not to me, Kirsty?’ counter-questioned the judge, lawyer-like rising to the encounter when the worst had come, and putting a bold face on the

interview of the morning. 'I'm all the father she has ever known ; the worse for her, poor woman.'

'And little respect she paid you in the light of a father,' Miss Kirsten reminded him with acrimony, 'when you sought to hinder her from throwing herself and her tocher away on a debauchee and profligate like her bonnie cousin Willie Hyndford. It was "stop me who dare" then with my lady. She and her gay wooer snapped their fingers at your authority and laughed in your face.'

'Indeed, sir,' said Mr. Hendrie with slow pedantry, 'I have been led to apprehend that these Hyndfords deserve little favour at your hands. You must be aware that they have already cost you much more than her miserable trifle of a tocher which she snatched out of your hands when you would have held it back and tied it up for her protection. I understand he was in the habit of making a jeer over

his cups at the way they had got the better of you and put you to expense. But I believe that did not prevent her from coming to you to take him out of the sanctuary of the Abbey, or get him out of dyvours' quarters elsewhere, more than once on his road to the dogs. There is even a whisper you stopped the arrest of his body when it was on its last journey to the Hyndford vault in Muiravon Kirk. For the halflin, his son, I have it on the best authority there is not such another black sheep in the three wards of Lanarkshire. So, sir, do not say that you have not been warned before you resume your connection with such promising *protégés*,' ended Mr. Hendrie, wiping his fingers daintily with his napkin, as if he symbolically cleared himself of all responsibility in the matter.

‘Oh ! father, will you allow such an ungrateful, worthless, godless crew to get round you and rob you, when your own flesh and blood are lawful claimants on your care

and need all you have to spare?' cried Mrs. Weir in her widow's helmet, making common cause with her brother and sister, and at the same time turning fiery, greedy glances from her children to her father.

'It is all true,' granted Harry, doggedly and sadly. 'Poor Ailsie was a headstrong lass. The men folk of the Hyndfords have been a bad lot. But we are none of us without stain or spot, and I should have thought Ailsie, at least, who was only thoughtless and light-hearted, and who has suffered so much—my God! what that lass must have suffered to change her as she is changed—might have met with some mercy at your hands—ay,' protested the judge, carried away by his tender sympathy till he plucked up spirit and brought down his clenched fist with indignant force on the table, 'at yours, Kirsten, who were her old playmate and companion—at yours, Hendrie, who are a young man in your prime—are you not black

affronted, man, to match your untried strength against the weakness of a broken-down woman—a forlorn widow, an unhappy mother?—at yours, Isobel, who are a widow and a mother yourself, and cannot foretell what is in store for you through your ain bairns. I think it would better become the whole three of you—in my poor judgment, it would be nearer what is right and kind—if you would show more consideration and feeling for Ailsie, if you would even go so far as to bid her here.’

‘Bid Ailsie Hyndford back here! after she ran away from the shelter of your roof and cast scorn upon it, when she was a light-headed, proud madam, holding us all as dirt beneath her feet—after she stood by her blackguard of a man in mocking at law and order, and wasting their substance till she has come to the want and misery that are the fit portion of the waster and the fool—never! father, so long as I sit at the head of your table and might be asked to

bear her company,' vowed Miss Kirsten with a determination which could not be doubted; 'no, though you should break every glass on the table-head instead of only making them dirl with your violence. As she has brewed, so she must drink. What law have you for any other end?'

'I give up the law on the point in dispute, but I think I might say something for the gospel in this case,' muttered Harry.

'Really, sir,' remonstrated Mr. Hendrie, but not otherwise than coolly, as at a proposal which could not possibly take effect, 'if you mean to cumber yourself with such queer cattle, I do think it is time some of us were setting up a separate establishment.'

'Father,' Mrs. Weir panted under the injury she had sustained, 'would you even me and my dead man and my innocent bairns to Ailsie Hyndford and her set of waffies? Did I disobey or defy you when I wedded with Sandy

Weir?—you gave me your consent and blessing. And there was never a word heard against my man. If his elder brother had not married, and his uncle, who was to have come from the Indies with a fortune, had not bidden still and spent it there, we need have been beholden to nobody, we would have stood in no man or woman's way,' glancing askance at Miss Kirsten and Mr. Hendrie, who were too much concerned with their new grievance to pay any heed to her reference, 'we should have been in our comfortable down-sitting, living on our own abundant means. Could I help these misfortunes? And a fell-like way Ailsie Hyndford must have reared her only bairn—her that pretended to be so clever,' mocked Mrs. Weir in a tone of triumph, 'that he should be a by-word for everything that is evil before he is out of his teens. A fine example the word of him would be to my well-conducted lads?'

'Well, well, have it your own way,' said

Lord Balfour, pushing back his chair and rising from the table, half in anger and sorrow, half overborne by their clamour. He did not go, however, without firing a parting shot at his tyrants. ‘ ‘Deed, though you were all agreed, and every one of you were to hold out a helping hand to poor Ailsie, I do not know that she would take it.’

CHAPTER III.

A LORD OF SESS A CLIENT IN HIS TURN.

IN the spring gloaming Lord Balfour was walking along that wonderful High Street of old Edinburgh, with its tall ‘lands’ or blocks of building in which many a family of good position lodged—Paris fashion—on the different *étages*, from which innumerable lights were twinkling row upon row; with its low lucken-booths for huckstering trade, and its grey Castle on the rock, like the lion couchant of Arthur’s seat, keeping watch and ward over the ancient capital.

The Judge was threading his way through the crowd of working people in hodden grey

and linsey-woolsey, blue bonnets and white mutches ; of ladies and gentlemen in hoops and hoods, long-skirted coats and cocked hats ; of lawyers' clerks, who were not in the habit of wielding any weapon more formidable than a pen ; and of old Highlanders of the City Guard, who still shouldered warlike Lochaber axes.

Harry Ba'four's was a well-known figure among the motley groups, and one liable to be detained and beset by suitors ; but he pressed on with such an evident disinclination to be interrupted that his rare self-absorption was respected.

Harry was bound for Mrs. Hyndford's lodgings in order to ascertain for himself her manner of living. He would not entrust his errand to another, neither could he have borne to be the means of exposing her straits. He found the address she had given him, which was in one of the many narrow closes that intersected the street and contained houses swarming

with inhabitants of various classes—for the most part humbler than the residents in the main street. Mrs. Hyndford was not on the ground floor, where a shopkeeper combined his ‘meal and barley shop’ with his family mansion; nor on the second floor, where a mantuamaker with her assistants had her place of business; nor on the third floor, where a caddy, whose sedan chair cumbered the entrance, kept house with his wife and afforded bed and board to the mantuamaker’s humbler apprentices. There was no more than a fourth storey, which dwindled into garrets, and these, Harry was told when he was half-way up the steep dark stair, were occupied by a washerwoman and clear-starcher. He was on the point of retracing his steps and having recourse with a sinking heart to ‘the laigh house,’ the cellar-like region below the street, when the tones of a familiar voice caught his ear, and he persevered in his ascent. The upper landing was dark like the

stair, but the room door at which Mrs. Hyndford had just been holding colloquy with her landlady and neighbour remained ajar. And there within was Ailsie Hyndford—in the bare ‘coom-ceilinged’ room, scantily furnished with the simplest necessities of the poor; a homely bed, a common deal table and chairs, an aumrie with the few plates, bowls, and cooking utensils which were required, and an ordinary spinning-wheel and reel by the fire, that, blinking on the whitewashed ‘cheeks’ to its iron fore-face, presented the single cheerful object in the room. She was conspicuous at the first glance, for she stood between the new comer and the high small window, taking advantage of what sunset light flooded it to darn to the last moment the lace in her hand. She did not recognise an old friend’s step, and was too well accustomed to the men and women in the house passing up and down the stair to be startled by the sound, while the deep shadow in which Lord Balfour

lingered prevented her from distinguishing that he was a visitor of her own class.

He had time to observe her deliberately as she remained there—motionless save for her busy fingers—in her shabby black gown, with her high widow's cap, like that of his daughter, towering above her early-silvered hair and worn face. She was handling with care and skill and a gentle-woman's appreciation of its cobweb texture, such an heirloom as she had been wont to wear on her own dainty young matron's head when she had first presided as Mrs. Hyndford in her husband's house of the Leas.

As Harry Ba'four looked his eyes grew dazzled, and it was not the Ailsie Hyndford, the poor forlorn widow, the last of a spendthrift house, earning her bread as she best might, whom he saw. It was the old Ailsie Hyndford, child and girl, in very different circumstances. Here was the bonnie orphan bairnie with her thick-coming droll fancies, who beguiled the

hardest disciplinarian into making a pet of her. And here was the lovely, witty lass, the belle of old Edinburgh—two scenes in whose life were specially present to the memory of her former guardian at this moment.

The one had occurred on the night of a Hogmanay—that chief of ‘the daft days’ which sour, dour Scotchmen included in their calendar—when half of the young sparks who had met at the Cross to drink in the New Year rushed headlong to the very house in the High Street still occupied by Harry Ba’four, each fired with the individual ambition of being the first-foot to greet bonnie Ailsie Hyndford in the dawning of the glad New Year. There had been such an uproar, in addition to the alarming prospects of a succession of single combats with walking rapiers, beneath the lawyer’s window that some of the City Guard had come up, and he himself had looked out and threatened to read the Riot Act in his nightcap. But the

turmoil had been instantaneously appeased, and all the young fools had gone away content, after Ailsie Hyndford had appeared at her window and announced that each man was her first-foot, and she would dance with every one of them in turn before the year was out.

The other incident happened when Ailsie had been going in the Balfours' coach to the Assembly Rooms, and the party had been met at the door by the English officers of a regiment then quartered in the Castle. To be sure, they had allowed Harry and his wife to pass with the usual greetings, but when Ailsie came forward—and she happened to be the sole young lady with them, since Kirsten had been laid up with the mumps and Mrs. Balfour did not care to take the trouble of bringing out strange young ladies—the fellows sprang forward, drew their swords and crossed them above Ailsie's head, forming a glittering, perilous arch for her to walk under, just as some of the London fine

gentlemen had made good the entrance of a less innocent queen of hearts into one of their Southern ballrooms. Ailsie held up her head, and stepped forward without blinking or covering, as most lasses would have done, at the flash and clash of cold steel. Why, they said every gentleman in the regiment, from the portly colonel to the slimmest lieutenant, was at her feet, and there was like to be a mutiny in the King's service on her account; and she was so much in request at this very assembly that she alone had danced in two of the sets arranged for specially distinguished dancers. She had figured with great credit in the 'Beauty set' along with the young ladies of the Eglintoun and Balcarres families, renowned for their personal charms, and she had been invited to stand up in the 'Heartsome set,' with no less wags than Mistress Cockburn¹ and Stair's daughter, as a rare tribute in the case of one

¹ Alison Cockburn's Letters.

so young to a blithe tongue. He had been proud of his charge that night. Was this the end—a prematurely aged widow mending lace for her bread by the fading light in a garret in Horn Close?

Lord Balfour could bear the contrast no longer, and to dismiss the images in his mind he crossed the threshold and disturbed Mrs. Hyndford by a hasty ‘Good evening to you, Ailsie.’

She started, but she showed herself ready to welcome him without false shame, while she was equally prompt to stand on the defensive. It was as if she felt bound to mark the gulf which fortune and her own deed had placed between them, and to maintain her perfect right to preserve all that was left of her independence in refusing to be drawn from her own side of the gulf by anything he could say or do.

‘Good evening, Lord Balfour—I would say it is kind of you to seek me out and I am glad

to see you if this were a fitter place for your presence,' she said frankly. 'However, as you are here, come in and take a seat by the fire; the evenings are cold yet, and you were wont to feel chilly after your long days in the House contending with glib advocates and camsteery witnesses over these weary law papers,' she ended with an irrepressible smile, as she drew forward a chair for him.

He allowed her to do it, wondering vaguely how long it was since anybody save Gillie had remembered that he was apt to be chilly of an evening, and speculating in a dim fashion why it was that, though his chair always stood vacant for him, no kind voice ever invited him to fill it.

'You'll not mind that the seat is hard,' she apologised, but without any abatement of resolute cheerfulness in confessing the incontestable defect. 'I'm doubtful there are few seats for us auld folk to sit down upon that are not

hard, let them be furnished with ever so many cushions, so that it comes to much the same thing in the end,' she finished with a half-defiant, half-dreamy philosophy.

Ailsie Hyndford classing herself with him as 'us auld folk,' how odd it sounded !

'And you'll excuse me,' she continued briskly, 'for not remaining idle while we talk, since my time is all my fortune now. When it comes to that we can have our crack every bit as comfortably while I spin.'

She sat down on a stool behind the wheel, and prepared to draw out the thread and turn the wheel, as he had seen his mother and still more frequently the female servants of the house, or farmers' wives and daughters and peasant women, spin by the hearth in winter and at the house door in summer.

But her next words were hardly consistent with her action. 'Is it worth it all, my lord?' she asked suddenly. 'I mean ; is what we are

able to enjoy in life worth the burdens we have to bear from the cradle to the grave?'

'One greater than I has answered that question, Ailsie,' he said gently, 'though Solomon may seem to contradict Him whiles. But, woman,' he broke off hotly, 'what call is there for you to live like this in a garret, toiling for your bit and sup and widow's duds, when I have a long enough purse to meet all your wants, as well as my family's demands—twice over?'

'Because I am not really one of your family—because you have already loaded me and mine with benefits that are crushing me to the earth,' she answered at once, turning her wheel.

'Do not say that,' he forbade her; 'have you not more trust in me than such words imply?' he asked reproachfully.

'Trust!' she exclaimed; 'I have trusted you with all I hold dear. I have gone to you again and again in the face of the wrongs you have

suffered from me and mine, as sinners only dare approach their Maker. But just because I honour you before all men, Harry Ba'four, I crave of you to spare me some smallest crumb of self-respect.'

But how can I suffer it?' he pleaded. 'How can I live at ease, and know that you who were brought up in my house are faring like this?'

'You do not live at ease; you have your own troubles, poor man,' she said softly, turning the tables upon him unexpectedly, and looking up at him with a great pity for the shortcomings of his life, that had a singular effect in their relative circumstances, shining out of those dark eyes. 'And it is good for me that I should bear the yoke in my age; it takes me out of myself and keeps my heart from breaking, to spin like this'—and she recommenced her spinning—'and to ken weel all the time that if I stopped for an hour I should owe my next meal to cauld charity. Do you not know by

your own experience, my lord, that we have only the choice left us either to spin wool and yarn and these hawering law papers of yours, or else the torn fibres of our own bleeding hearts?'

'Ay, ay,' he assented with a groan; 'I have no quarrel with work for its own sake, either for you or me or any man or woman born. I hold it to be the true *elixir vitæ*. But you might find fitter work, Ailsie my bairn,' he finished tenderly.

'Hout!' she objected, with a slight toss of the head that had been an old habit of hers, which survived among its present surroundings like a child's laugh in the middle of a penitential psalm or a requiem. 'Whatails you at my lace-mending or my spinning? I will not have you cast laith at them. They are honest work, which is more than can be said of all the practices of your trade of the law, Lord Balfour. My room is weathertight and clean.

The folk in the house are decent bodies. They do not plague me—na, they look upon me as one of the many leddies in trouble, and who so respectful and kind to them as the real poor? Forby they keep me in work. Jenny Haddo allows me the mending of all the laces she gets to wash, and Miss Nanny Fernie's brother is a master weaver, and takes my hanks of yarn off my hands. But I have so much consideration for you, sir, that I would have gone away out of your ken, and out of sight and sound of my auld set, only I feared I should starve in the country, while I hoped I was as well hidden from all my former acquaintances in one of the closes here as if I had been buried alive among the peat hags of Lanarkshire.'

'I was never your match in words, Ailsie, lawyer and judge though I be, but it goes against the grain with me that you should win this battle,' said Harry, in extreme perplexity how to bend her high spirit. 'Is there no way of

escape? Woman, I would rather marry you out of hand myself.'

The words slipped from him inadvertently in rueful jest as the one absurd solution of the difficulty which presented itself to his mind.

She received the suggestion with an answering jest. 'And do you think I would let you, my lord?' she cried gaily.

'And, by my word, do you think you could hinder me, Ailsie?' he cried again, and then he stopped short, for he was no longer in idle jest but in dead earnest. Her speech had been like flint striking steel, causing fire to flash from the encounter. An inspiration had come to him, and all the passion of his nature leapt up to meet it. Why should he not marry Ailsie Hyndford? He was all the man he had ever been, and she had been his darling from her childhood. Both the Willie Hyndfords had forfeited all claim on her allegiance, though the memory of her first love, and the widowed wife and mother's tender-

ness might throw a mantle of charity over the sins alike of the dead and the living. In God's name, why should he not marry Ailsie Hyndford? There was no law, human or divine, against the marriage. Why should he not repair her wrongs, rescue her from drudgery and poverty, and make her the mistress of his house as she was mistress of his heart? Why should he not restore her to her old queenship in Edinburgh society, and take a manly pride in her womanly triumphs, while his own life in its latter end should be better than in its beginning? For his days would undergo a marvellous transformation, and an isolated weather-beaten stem might yet bud and blossom into a goodliness and glory of foliage and flowers sufficient to make him young again.

It was true that Ailsie Hyndford in point of years could have been his daughter. But a woman of her age was no longer young—witness Kirsten, who was really and truly his daughter,

and yet she often struck him as fit to be his grandmother. Ailsie, poor lamb, was old in care and sorrow—care and sorrow which he could console and convert into peace and gladness.

She said she would not let him, but who was she or any other woman to resist him when he had the mind? Though Harry Ba'four had married when a lad to please his father and mother, and in doing so had gone far to forfeit his natural birthright, continuing ever afterwards a man of little account in his family circle, he remained conscious in the middle of his weakness that there was mettle in him which, if he chose to exert it, few men and still fewer women could gainsay.

Mrs. Hyndford had looked up startled by the changed tone of his voice, which her sensitive ear caught in its first vibration. Her eyes fell before his intent gaze. She read as in an open book the illumination that had flashed across

his mind, his sudden, fixed design, and the tumult of half-awakened power and joy it had aroused in him.

There was an answering ferment in her own heart. She too had one of those natures which, however cruelly tried, retain to the last inexhaustible springs of youth and hope. She had said to him that she honoured him before all men. And it was true he was the best and greatest man she had ever known, though it had only been by her close contact with characters the reverse of his that she had learnt to comprehend the height and depth of his virtue and power.

Could she remain indifferent to the fact that such a man had conceived the desire to make her his wife—a desire which might have arisen in pity but was confirmed in love? For aged, broken, and sunk as she felt herself, she recognised at a glance that she was still fair in this man's eyes.

And the knowledge worked a miracle in recalling for a moment some part of Ailsie Hyndford's charms that had fled. Under his gaze and the thoughts which she knew were in his mind, her faded face bloomed again. Much of that nameless mobile grace which such women inherit as a potent gift, and rarely lose entirely until they lie senseless and stark in their coffins, came back to her air and her movements—to the lines of her face, the bend of her neck, the turn of her arm—as she sat in her shabby weeds of uncouth fashion spinning by a working woman's hearth.

But was it for Ailsie Hyndford to accept Harry Ba'four's homage, and thus pay back the debt she had declared never could be discharged—which had been incurred in all he had done for her and hers, and, what was a still heavier obligation, all he had borne from them? Was she to reward this last most generous, uncalculating love by giving him the dregs of her life

and the degradation which her husband and child had brought on her and their name?

Ah! but she could give him something else—something very different. Ailsie Hyndford had kept also, through all the failure of her past, and her grief and shame for her share in that failure, an abiding sense of the inalienable inheritance she possessed, of what she might have been at her best and in favourable circumstances, of what she might still be—God helping her—to one she loved. She had fathomed wearily in former days the narrow, dull, intolerably self-satisfied natures of the children who had become dictators and tyrants to Harry Ba'four. Her early association with them had something to do with her youthful rebellion. She could not altogether ignore her own contrasted qualities, the wealth, warmth, and brightness—above all, the honest humility—of her heart and brain. She knew that even as a child with him she had been able to win the

head of the house from his weighty concerns, to divert and delight him. And if she were with him as a woman with the man she held in highest reverence and deepest love, as a true wife with her husband she might still be what Heaven had meant her to be, the sun of her husband's home firmament, the well in his garden, his chief earthly light and refreshment, his crown of human glory and gladness, with a price far above rubies. And oh! the exchange in having for a husband, instead of the reckless prodigal Willie Hyndford, Harry Ba'four, the just judge, the upright and loyal gentleman—the hardest man to himself, the softest to the weak, to women and to bairns.

Ailsie Hyndford had always been furious at the disparaging treatment which Harry Ba'four received from his household. Were she in their place to teach them a lesson, would she not worship the very ground he trod on, and lay

the hair of her head under his feet, if that could get him the least pleasure?

In the wild whirl of contending emotion Ailsie Hyndford span the faster, filling the whole of the little room with the agitated hum of the wheel and threatening every moment to snap her thread, while Harry Ba'four had risen and stood opposite her, his tall figure leaning against the wall, a grand presence in the homely interior.

At last he cried, 'Have you no word for me, Ailsie?' And it was an eager lover's reproach rather than an old friend's complaint. Neither did he go on to explain himself further with regard to the great change which had come over him, for her breathless silence proved to him that she had distinguished not only between jest and earnest, but between friendship and love.

'Oh, my lord, you are mad to make such a proposal,' she said, dropping her thread from

trembling fingers which could no longer hold it, 'and I am mad to listen to you.'

But he had her hands in his, and her head was on his breast, for he comprehended that both silence and protest meant nothing.

'My lord, my lord, what will Kirsten and Hendrie say?' she remonstrated again—not without a suspicion of the archness and love of mischief engrained in her nature, deep down beneath the dire results of time and trial. She had not danced in the days of her youth in the Heartsome set at the Assembly Rooms for nothing.

He swerved a little aside at the words, while a mixture of dismay—half pathetic, half ludicrous—entered into his joy and triumph. It was another evidence of the singular despotism which common-placeness and meanness sometimes exercise over genius and generosity. But he rallied the next moment, grasping her hand. 'Let them say what they will, never you heed

them, Ailsie, my bonnie woman ; am I not master in my own house ? Are my own bairns to question my lawful authority ? They had better ca' canny. If they speak a word against you, my love, they shall answer for it to me in a manner they little dream of.'

In the emergency even Harry Ba'four was tempted to bluster. He was valiant behind the back of the enemy.

But there was a lurking acknowledgment of his deadly weakness in his next speech : 'If you will but stand by me, Ailsie,' he besought her wistfully, 'we'll beat the whole world.'

And at these words Ailsie Hyndford's quick intuition penetrated in the fullest sense the truth that in complying with the dearest wish of this man's soul she would not merely bless him and bless herself in so doing, but that, while she filled up the aching void which it pained and mortified her to know had always

existed in his life, she would likewise free her best friend from a dreary incubus and degrading bondage. It was not to his honour that they had been suffered to exist and grow till they crippled his greatness in the present, and were in danger of crushing it in the future.

In the almost fierce resentment which the last consideration kindled in Ailsie Hyndford, she pledged herself willingly to her former guardian, she even felt a species of wrathful delight in the contemplated circumvention of the certain opposition to their marriage. She was no weak girl to be put down by those persons who had no right to control her actions, who were bound to defer to Harry Ba'four's lightest wish. She became strong to bear any indignity for his sake. She was his champion and defender, as he was hers. And it belonged to the temper of this woman not only to weep with keenest gratitude over the new boon of

finding herself protected, but to crave to be a protector in her turn, and to fight like a lioness for the creature she defended. She must serve Harry Ba'four thenceforth as a strong tower against his treacherous faintness of heart, a bulwark that should never fail him between him and his household foes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAVELLERS BY AN OLD EDINBURGH AND
LONDON COACH.

THE old Edinburgh and London coach, which had originally started on its periodical journeys between the capitals once a fortnight, had become multiplied into coaches which ran twice a week, encountering and hailing each other as they passed on the road. Not only were the travellers who availed themselves of the public conveyances, and who accomplished in safety the days and night of peril by flood and field, exposure to hardship and general bone-shaking, which could only have a charm for the young because associated with the delights of change

and motion, fully entitled to respect from their fellow-townsmen as men and women who had successfully surmounted an arduous adventure and attained a valuable experience ; they had the reward of finding themselves on the occasions of their departure and return objects of interest and curiosity to their entire world. These gallant travellers were the important if somewhat oppressed custodians of much treasure in the form of bandboxes and letters which could by no means be entrusted to the common post and the ordinary carrier. And when the stout-hearted gentlemen and ladies came back—if they did come back—they brought with them, in addition to return treasure, news of the wonders and enormities of the great world beyond the Tweed ; tidings of the doings of the Court, which had not graced Scotland with its presence since the needs of the Charleses recalled them as suppliants to the mother-country, for which they had no filial feeling ; of the state

of affairs on 'Change ; of the prospects of authors in Grub Street ; of the freaks of fashion in Soho.

Nay, there was another and a sensational element in the excitement which the travellers evoked. It was well known they were not always the honest men and women they professed to be. Mufflers were useful for other purposes than keeping out the cold. Highway-men were not confined to their native heaths. Stories were afloat of these true gentlemen of the road figuring in disguise among their unsuspecting fellow-travellers, who carried in all unconsciousness their bane in their midst, as the unlucky miller bore off his brownie in the centre of his household gods. No wonder that prospective travellers and their friends read anxiously the names inscribed in the coach-books, and, if the titles were unfamiliar, peered doubtfully into the faces of the owners of the names as they gathered at the place of meeting. But of course to the mere spectator there was an additional

zest contributed to the spectacle by the bare idea of a Dick Turpin swaggering about the coach-stand, with the terrible consequences which must follow. These were as follows :

A shrill whistle would issue suddenly from the body of the coach, or from the box or the back seat as it suited the whistler's convenience, just when the travellers were on the edge of a lonely moor or in the dip of a particularly dark hollow through which the road ran. Before the performer could be detected and overpowered, a band of desperate fellows wearing masks or crape over their faces, and brandishing horse pistols, would rush from nowhere. Their appearance would prove the signal for loud cries of 'Stand and deliver,' the rearing of horses, the screaming of men, with the crack of a stray pistol-shot, and the flash of a misdirected rapier, as an excuse for the hubbub. At last the coach would drive on, considerably the lighter by the loss of the greater part of

luggage, the mail-bags, and the purses of the more timorous of the travellers. And the merry music of the horn, when next they approached a town, would be seriously impaired by the smothered groans of a man or two who had sustained flesh wounds, or the long-drawn sobs of a woman who was still in hysterics. But the injuries might not be mortal, and with what an agreeable sense of having figured as heroes and heroines at least once in their lives the story would be told by the survivors! How long it would last them! How often it would be brought out and aired at friendly festivals, family gatherings, New Year celebrations, till it descended, with the embellishment of sundry flourishes and variations, to remote generations, as 'our great-grandfather's or great-grand-aunt's romantic adventure with footpads.' Ah! the old coach journeys, with their fatigues and perils had also their compensation.

Taking everything into consideration, the

departure and the arrival of the Edinburgh and London coaches were among the great events of the Edinburgh day at that date. And, as if to suit the public convenience in this as in other respects, the coaches started and returned alternately morning and evening. That house was favoured in its prospect the windows of which, like those of Lord Balfour's house, looked out on the High Street, commanding a near view of the bustle of the coach-stand. The fortunate tenants had unfailing topics of conversation both at breakfast and supper in what travellers had come and gone with the coach, and what last word it had brought from London and York. Even Miss Kirsten was understood to unbend and to abandon the task in hand—the dusting out of the drawing-room, the assorting of the housekeeping stores, the washing up of her mother's tea china—in order to stand at her particular window and watch in the morning or evening dusk the little drama

that was played before her eyes, and which had this advantage over any act on the stage proper, that here was real life, and Miss Kirsten had often a personal acquaintance with the actors.

As for Mr. Hendrie, he made it his regular business to pick his steps across the dirty street twice a day that he might be at the crisis of the event. He affected to despise gossip, but took a secret pride in being the first to hear the news, which he was prepared to dispense in the character of a half-contemptuous oracle. And it was a matter of moment to him that he should not be an hour behind in reading the last report of the last English opera, the last account of the last meeting of an antiquarian society—any more than in the last mode in shoe buckles or queues. For Mr. Hendrie was a frequenter of the musical society which had Lord Kelly for its head, and aspired to be as much of a virtuoso as of a fop.

On a mild April evening in the year of grace 17—, the Highflyer, Edinburgh and London coach, was about to start as usual from what served as its office in the High Street. There were the groups of punctual travellers in old-fashioned wrap-rascals and comforters, pelisses and riding-habits—though no lady was going to mount on horseback—beavers and capuchins ; with the loyal convoys of friends who came without fail to see the travellers off—as the next-of-kin of emigrants now escort them on board ship—pacing the street, watching the packing of the coach, and criticising each horse as it was led out. Idle onlookers in yet larger numbers sauntered or stood with both hands in their pockets if the gazers were men, and one hand in a pocket, or the two clasped in a satin and laced muff, if they were women. And still more people filled the mouths of the adjacent closes, or sat and stood at the various windows which took in the show.

For these were the days when windows were in great request—not only for light within the house, but for inspection of the world without, with express reference to a man or a woman's next neighbour. So far from feeling any modern shame with regard to looking out of a window or being induced to hide in a craven and hypocritical fashion behind a *jalousie*, it did not then require a royal procession to bring the occupants of the houses, great and small, in a street to each window, high or low, broad bow, or narrow slit which gave on the thoroughfare. It was the good folks' daily and hourly practice to take their observations from their several coignes of vantage, and to spend many minutes, even when the weather was severe, in what was called 'lying over' the open windows to see farther up and down or round a corner that the starers might the better pursue their lawful vocation of public inspectors and qualified

critics, quite as much as that they should call a cordial ‘good day,’ or put a pertinent question in a frank, unconstrained manner to their acquaintances of all ranks passing below. To walk up such a street as the High Street of Edinburgh under the old *régime* was not simply to find picturesque breadths of contrast in the details of the street itself, but to run the gauntlet of the multitude of eyes at the tier upon tier of windows, and if a man were bold, to return the sharp fire. Galleries of living pictures in single figures, and family groups, in whole and half lengths, of men, women, and children, whose poor, inanimate representations in oil on canvas are now carefully shut up in kings’ and rich men’s collections as historical art treasures, were freely offered then for the inspection of the rude mechanic or peasant lout with a kind of royal bounty. There were fewer secrets in the life of the old world, with all its gross offences. *Æsthetics* have lost

something by the recent mania for seclusion, and philanthropy is not without its deprivation in wholesome individual influence and warm personal sympathy. A leader in a newspaper or a story in a book is not altogether a substitute for the pithy expression of opinion on the part of seers and believers, or the keen fellow-feeling of the actual witnesses to a living drama.

Certainly no occurrence in old Edinburgh was in a greater degree public property than the departures and arrivals of the coaches. And with every allowance for the exceptional exigencies of highwaymen, one would have thought no worse choice could have been made by those who sought privacy for their proceedings than to fix on one of the common vehicles of transit for their operations.

The crowd of spectators on this April evening found rather a limited company of travellers on whom to bestow their attention. There were but four insides. The only man was a

lean and thrifty gentleman from the Record Office, wrapped in a thread-bare calimanco cloak or rauchen which might have been the very old cloak that is commemorated in a Scotch song ancient enough to have been quoted by Gentle Will, or it might have been the stage mantle of an artificial villain.

However, the man in the cloak was well known in Edinburgh as a perfectly pacific, even somewhat timid, elderly gentleman ; and it was as clearly apprehended that he had been deputed by his office to proceed to London to consult with his Scuthern brethren on a long-standing difficulty in the northern office.

There was an English beauty and heiress who had been so foolish as to marry a poor Scotch laird and had never forgotten her condescension. She was about to journey South in order to refresh her spirits by a lengthened sojourn among her civilised and wealthy relations.

There was the homely, kindly, modest, gude-wife of a well-to-do skipper, who was venturing all the way to London in order to catch a last glimpse of her brave man before he sailed from that port on a two years' voyage.

And there was a poor lady in rusty black who came late and betrayed her friendlessness. since she arrived unaccompanied by a single ally.

The outsiders were more numerous and heterogeneous—ranging from the hardy husband of the English lady, who might have had his own reasons for considering the spring night wind 'less unkind' than the atmosphere which surrounded his wife, and the clerk of the gentleman from the Record Office, to raw young lads. The last were going off to seek their fortunes and to test the truth of a scornful English proverb which declared that while it needed but a single pair of shoes to bring a willing Sawney across the Border to the land of wheat and fat cattle,

with plenishing and dainties in store, at least seven pairs were demanded to carry the same feet creeping back to bear and black sheep, kail and kilts.

The four privileged persons took their places within the narrow bounds in which they were to dwell in close proximity for a period of time which can only be matched now in a land journey by the days and nights an American train takes to speed across the rolling prairies and mountain ranges which lie between Geoffry Hudson's city, hard by the Atlantic, and the Golden Gate of the Pacific.

The laird's lady took as her undoubted right the lion's share of the room for herself, her roquelaire and calèche, and her minor trifles of foot-stools and cushions, cordials and essences. The Recorder, who was mannerly and somewhat of a time-server to boot, devoted himself a little rashly to her service, and cheerfully consented to sit, hemmed in by her belongings, for

the hundreds of miles which intervened between him and his destination. The sailor's wife annihilated herself as far as it was possible in her comfortable bulk, and withdrew with her baskets of substantial provisions into the remotest corner. But the poor lady in black betrayed a remnant of the high spirit and imprudent temper which had doubtless conduced to her present forlorn condition, in declining to be hustled out of her seat by a window. The fine lady looked her opponent over with the arrogant eyes which nature had given her, and when that simple process of putting down an inferior failed, had recourse to the more artificial and imposing mode of levelling her quizzing glass at the offender. For quizzing, which was called by its right name a hundred years ago, is by no means a nineteenth-century acquisition of its present proficient. The young Lady Pitteuchar's self-elected cavalier showed himself shocked at the audacity of the unattended and

nameless gentlewoman—she had only written herself in the coach-book ‘a lady.’ The skipper’s wife looked scared. Lady Pitteuchar called her husband for the fifth time to the coach door. ‘Pitteuchar,’ she said, in her piping voice, which was still quite distinct, indeed she was taking the trouble to speak more plainly than usual, ‘you see the evil of not posting like people of our condition. A lady is exposed to contact with low persons who think nothing of insulting her. I have a great mind to go back yet.’

‘Oh no, my dear,’ cried the poor man in alarm, for he knew there were no bounds to her vagaries, and that she would even punish herself rather than restrain them; ‘you’ll not think of taking the rue now with the seats paid through, and your ain folk and the life you care for awaiting you at the end of the journey—surely you would not let your pride out-gang your profit.’

‘That is one of your low proverbs, and the payment of the seats is nothing to me in comparison with my comfort and the respect which is my due,’ she mounted her high horse instantly. ‘It is like your countrymen, sir, to mention the things in the same breath.’

‘The payment of the seats is something to me,’ groaned the laird, ‘and this jaunt will be long minded among the Pitteuchar accounts. I thought it would have pleased you for once, woman,’ he remonstrated in his candour and exasperation. And then he added a clause to the sentence in a lower tone that was inaudible within the coach, but which served for the edification of the little crowd without, to whom a wrangle for places was as grist to their mill, and who loved still more dearly a brawl, civil or foreign. ‘But nothing within the reach of mortal man would content a petted quean who is never twelve hours free from the fling-stings.’

Mr. Andrew Dundas of the Record Office made peace by suggesting like a cautious man, in the ear of the beauty and heiress, that the unaccommodating individual—Mr. Andrew did not venture to call her a lady in such a hearing—was merely bound for Berwick, and by the next morning at the farthest the company would be quit of her.

It may be noted here that neither the young Lady Pitteuchar nor Mr. Andrew had been of the cream of Edinburgh society twenty years before.

‘What call had I to contradict her?’ the malcontent was asking herself half impatiently, half disconsolately. ‘I might have let her domineer as she chose—though’ it would hardly have suited me to be driven from the window—I have more to take up my head about. But it was like me to stand up against insolence that could do no great harm save to the haughty madam herself, who will tell a

different story if she and I ever see Auld Reekie again. Will he come, think you? Under the very glower of Kirsten claiming the best place at the window, with Isobel peeping over her shoulder, too mim as a widow, to gaze openly into the street—after what another widow is prepared to do! Oh, Ailsie, Ailsie Hyndford, what have you to say for yourself? Yet I mourned truly for wild Willie Hyndford, who led me a fell dance, and I thought to go softly for the rest of my days. Will Harry come, think you, to break the bonds—which are but of tow after all, yet have the warpings of a lifetime—in order to be true to himself and to me?’

It may be said in so many words there was no necessity for Lord Balfour and Mrs. Hyndford, with ‘a purpose of marriage’ in their minds, to repair to the Border to put the purpose into execution, even if they sought to carry it out with the quietness and simplicity dear to Scotch

law, and not unwelcome to Scotch nature in its blateness and thrift. For a wedding conducted on the elopement principle saved much idle display and useless waste. Abuses of the age in this respect were great, a century ago. In effect a notion began to prevail that an honourable private marriage speedily acknowledged was on the whole a more decorous step than a compliance with the coarsely splendid clamour and parade of the public marriage of the times.

Lord Balfour and Mrs. Hyndford had a keen perception of all that was incongruous and open to ridicule in the affair. In their elderly sheepishness they sought to escape the notice which younger and more thoughtless people, with their effrontery not yet impaired, actually court. The seniors knew further that the slightest intimation of their intention must provoke the violent opposition of relatives whose rancour was scarcely rendered less

formidable by the fact that their power—like a title of courtesy—was conceded by favour of one of the victims. The couple had the greatest temptation to what was styled a run-a-way marriage. True, a run-a-way marriage was specially unbecoming in people whose run-a-way days were over; it was far below the dignity of a judge, and would have constituted a heinous irregularity in the member of an English bench. Certainly a whole Lord Chancellor eloped in his time, still Lord Eldon was only Jack Scott when he carried off Bessie Surtees, and such an indiscretion was far from his thoughts when he sat on the woolstack. It was left for a Scotch judge to play the vagabond part of Jock o' Hazeldean.

Harry Ba'four was a full-fledged judge at the time he meditated the escapade so outrageous in his circumstances. But he was still more Harry Ba'four than the great lawyer, and Harry Ba'four he would continue to the end

of the chapter. He was the most incorrigibly natural and impulsive of men, in the middle of his sagacity and erudition, deeply ashamed of his eccentricity, but utterly incapable of conquering it. He vindicated the curious truth that rash, romantic — even fantastic feats have been perfectly possible to the stout Scotchman of mature years which would be simply incredible in the polished and genial man of the world, his English brother.

But if Harry Ba'four could be guilty of an elopement at his age and in his office, and if Ailsie Hyndford could consent to an impropriety which every good woman, though no more than a girl in her teens, feels more keenly than any man—if she could demean herself for his sake more than for her own, to believe that stratagems were allowable in love and war, and flight was the only means by which an oppressed man could defy his oppressors, and

free to his dying day his goodly manhood from the unseemly yoke of his encroaching children—even in that extreme case there was no call for the fugitives to travel for the space of twelve hours to Lamberton toll-bar, or to employ in their flight the public means of an Edinburgh and London coach. All Scotland possessed the same privileges as Lamberton on the eastern and Gretna Green on the western border; it was only benighted young English men and women who had not reached the age of independence that must rush to the limits of their country to marry whom they would, without the consent of parents and guardians—as who should have known so well as that legal authority, Harry Ba'four? Why, he had judged in his day dozens of delinquents in debatable marriages and found the important knot tight and indissoluble whether it were tied in the Highlands or the Lowlands or the far Islands, or even on such a rock of the ocean as

the Bass or Ailsa Craig, provided only a lad and lass called each other, in good faith, husband and wife before credible witnesses. More than that, here in the capital in his own good town, no farther off than the neighbourhood of the Palace of Holyrood in that portion of the old Abbey which has fallen down in the world and become a refuge for debtors and broken men, there existed a region to which Harry could get in a morning stroll, where there was provision made for the accomplishment of the secret and quickly concluded marriages of the citizens.

Certainly, whether because no fair amount of distance lent enchantment to the view, or for some other occult reason, there was a degree of disreputability attached to the town temple of Hymen which did not cling to the rural Berwickshire cottage or the Dumfriesshire blacksmith's shop.

All the same if Lord Balfour and Mrs.

Hyndford had sought to complete their contract without the remotest danger of delay and interference, they could with the greatest ease have stolen a march on their unconscious friends, met each other by appointment in the course of an early walk, and, in the slighting phrase peculiar to such Edinburgh marriages, 'taken the half merk' in the dingy, ill-flavoured house in the Canongate appropriated to these ceremonies.

But long-established precedent pointing to Lamberton or Gretna as the fitting scene of the act, and so lending a traditional propriety to the deed perpetrated there, induced many Scotch couples of position to undertake a toilsome journey, at a time when travelling was still difficult, to the confines of England in order to attain an end which English lovers were compelled to come within the bounds of Scotland to achieve, and which the favoured natives might have compassed as thoroughly in

the very next room to their hostile kindred. It might have seemed a graceful but rather foolish compliment—which one would scarcely have expected in the Scotch character for hard common sense—to English disliability. In reality it was a voluntary submission on the part of the most refractory to the venerable obligations of use and wont. Harry Ba'four, with all his eccentricity, was not indifferent to precedent—rather he was liable to be strongly influenced by association ; moreover it appears to his biographer that in the excitement of these days he must have been carried away by his feelings and rendered half frantic by what to a man of his character would be the strange jumble of perplexity, pride, affront, rapture, and anguish in the situation. And so he proposed to elope to Lamberton in the way the most illogical, but which was rendered well-nigh respectable and harmonious by the consecration of custom ; and he was going by the

Edinburgh and London coach, either because the great body of the fugitives went in a like manner, or for the more satisfactory reason that his setting out in a post-chaise and picking up Mrs. Hyndford on the road might, after all, attract greater suspicion, while it would savour yet more strongly of indecorum.

‘Will he come?’ sighed Ailsie Hyndford again to herself, growing sick with hope deferred and grievous apprehension lest her king of men should fail her—as, to be sure, in this instance his predecessor had not done. ‘It was only too good a ploy for Willie Hyndford,’ said Ailsie to herself, shaking her head unseen by her companions. ‘To think that any one woman should be so far left to herself as to elope twice in a single lifetime, though there may be an odds in the elopements! I should say it would be fitter for me than for young Lady Pitteuchar to take the rue.’

But Ailsie had to acknowledge that it would

be the sorest humiliation of all if, after having brought herself to this sorry pass a second time in her strange eventful history, she should be deprived of the opportunity of eloping by the absence of a partner in the performance, since the preparations for the coach starting were nearly completed and as yet there was no sign of the lagging bridegroom.

Then Mrs. Hyndford gave a great start and uttered half aloud a 'Gude preserve me!' while she said within herself in the height of her alarm and distress: 'Who is this but Mr. Hendrie in the room of his father? And though he kens nothing and guesses nothing, he cannot fail to see and speak with me, and what is to hinder him from catching Harry Ba'four in the act?'

Mr. Hendrie did come mincingly to the coach door. He greeted with effusion the young Lady Pitteuchar, for whom he had a great esteem, nodded condescendingly to Mr.

Andrew Dundas, and, peering still farther through the evening shades into the depths of the cumbrous vehicle, for he surpassed his sisters in inquisitiveness, he discovered Mrs. Hyndford, and, innocent man, felicitated himself on the discovery.

‘Good evening to you, Mrs. Hyndford.’ He addressed her with the languid affability which is peculiarly exasperating to a woman of lively temper. ‘Are you changing your abode with your garb? Are you going South to make your fortune?’ And he stared fixedly at her with a quick satirical recognition of what she had entertained a nervous fear was conspicuous in her dress—that she had laid aside her widow’s bonnet and cloak, though she still wore mourning.

He had no right to put such a question or make such a comment, and she was not slow to resent the impertinence. ‘My fortune is made, as you may find, Mr. Hendrie,’ she said with spirit.

Then by one of those strange subtle contradictions which are continually occurring in life, some slight hereditary trait or trick of gesture—inadvertently acquired by the elderly-minded young man, who was so unlike his father, flashed unexpectedly out upon the woman, who knew them both well, and reminded her vividly who the speaker was, and what was his ineffaceable relationship to Harry Ba'four.

With the recollection came a glorified vision of Mr. Hendrie's somewhat grotesque figure as it moved inextricably amidst scenes lit up by the glamour of youth. He had then been a lad several years the junior of herself and his sister Kirsten, and was in those days a good deal at their beck and call. He had never been very generous or kindly, but he had been considerably less sophisticated and self-conceited than now. He had even been proud of Ailsie's notice, and fain to do her will, when her notice conferred honour, and her service was in request.

Mrs. Hyndford bent forward and said tremulously with a tinge of superstition and still more of relenting in her accents, for what struck her at the moment as a plot against the companions of her girlhood, 'Cousin Hendrie, for auld acquaintance' sake, will you part friends? Will you assoilzie me of any evil intent against you and yours, and wish me god-speed before I start on my errand? It may be better for us all in the end.'

His pride was offended by the public proclamation of their relationship—before the young Lady Pitteuchar of all people. His vanity was hurt by Ailsie's classing herself with him in any future consequences which could accrue from the terms on which they met or parted. His hard worldly nature led him to treat any pretensions of hers to his consideration with simple contempt.

'I wish you such god-speed on your errand, madam,' he said, introducing his dainty

person into the coach and speaking in her ear as she leant forward to meet his advances, for a fine gentleman could not be openly rude to a lady, 'that I hope you will stay away where your presence may be better prized, and never return where, so far as I can see, your company is not wanted.'

Mrs. Hyndford recoiled as from a stab, but her eyes sparkled even while her lips quivered.

Another messenger than Mr. Hendrie came forward at the last moment to encourage the fainting heart of the traveller with hearty good wishes. The judge's clerk, Gillespie, with his red and ill-kempt locks, bolted across the street. His face was radiant with smiles and in his glee and natural irreverence of manner he managed to tread on Mr. Hendrie's toes till the dandy retired in bodily agony and mental disgust.

'A happy departure and a still happier return to your leddyship,' he addressed Ailsie with a careless misapplication of titles. 'Every

well-wisher of your trusty frien' Lord Balfour maun say as muckle.' After he had delivered the speech, as if sensible that he had been betrayed into an indiscretion unbecoming in a judge's clerk, however comprehensible in the familiar of Harry Ba'four, he also withdrew abruptly, but not too soon.

Lady Pitteuchar was crying out pettishly, 'Who is that hideous fellow? He is mad of course (Pitteuchar, where are you? You are never to be found when you are wanted). I never saw the man in my life before. Who is he my-ladying here?' And once more she looked over her fellow-traveller disdainfully.

But of what real avail could Gillie's homage and premature congratulations prove, though even the empty sound comforted for an instant the lonely, sensitive woman who had responded so quickly all her life to the shadow of insult or honour, harshness or kindness? Where was the use, if she had no secret but mighty fellow-

conspirator in her daring adventure, if she were left to go alone on her bootless expedition? Gillie's words did no more than stay the rising tide of humiliation and despair by a moment's mystified respite.

But before the moment was ended, as the Scotch Jehu mounted to his seat and prepared to handle the ribands and the hostlers moved from the horses' heads, a little cry got up that a tardy outside passenger was about to be left behind.

It was a traveller of the humblest description, who ought not to have taken it upon her to retard the progress of her' betters, whose unpunctual arrival was greeted with a general burst of impatience from both travellers and bystanders, as well as by Lady Pitteuchar's amazed inquiry whether all the tag, rag, and bobtail down to beggar-wives were to travel in her august company and conspire to keep her waiting?

The aggressor was not literally a 'beggar-

wife' though she was a member of the lowest industrial class and belonged to a public calling much less independent and picturesque than that of the Newhaven fish-wives. She was a specimen of the old Edinburgh 'water-wives' in one of their grey duffle cloaks with hoods that could be drawn over the women's mutches. These poor women were, for the most part, a set of decayed hangers-on, thankful to supply for the smallest gratuity the universal need of their more prosperous neighbours. Few, save the most poverty-stricken and helpless in other respects, assumed an office which from the dawn of history has been relegated to born helots and captive slaves.

In general the water-wives were less able-bodied than the old woman who was hastening to mount to the top of the coach without requiring the ladder to be replaced, and as a rule the poor creatures did not seek to go to any great distance from home.

A shout of censure and derision hailed the old woman's excited efforts. 'Lucky, you have been laith to set down your water stoups—they might have been gill stoups and held mountain-dew instead of Adam's wine. What are you wanting so far a-field? Carrying races of water maun be a good trade. Na, whup up your beasts, Jock, and dinna tarry for the impudent hizzie of a daft carline.'

But in the sensation which had been created the strangest effect of all was produced on Ailsie Hyndford, who after darting out one sharp glance at the miserable object of the commotion, fell back into the shadow in a sudden convulsion of laughter, which continued long after the horn had sounded its shrill blast and the coach had at last started. She would have covered her face with her hands, if she had dared, to hide the unseasonable mirth which other people might judge did not become her mature years and the sombre colour of her

garments, and which none of her companions shared. But she could only hold down her head, pull the cape of her pelisse round her, and trust to the deepening gloaming, while her dark eyes danced and her whole figure shook with the smothered expression of irrepressible merriment as the words shaped themselves in her thoughts. 'Oh! Harry, Harry Ba'four, there's nae fule like an auld fule. This is the maddest of all your mad pranks, and you a great judge as well as the head of a house, the father of a grown-up family, a man of three score!'

Happily the tramp of the horses' feet and the jolting and plunging of the coach on the not too smooth road combined still farther to drown the echo of the laughter, while Lady Pitteuchar chanced for the moment to be engrossed with some more pressing personal grievance. But Mr. Andrew Dundas did speculate with a passing spasm of consternation,

‘Is the woman in a fit?’ While the skipper’s gudewife settled in her own mind with a more agreeable sense of surprise, ‘Losh! she’s a canty cummer yon, for all her shabby gentility and her black gown, and for as white as she grew when the braw birkie showed her despite.’

CHAPTER V.

THE END OF THE ADVENTURE.

THE last grey gleam of the April daylight had faded into a dark night before the first stage of the journey was reached. The fitful chatter of Lady Pitteuchar had sunk into a cross drowsiness. Polite Mr. Andrew was beginning to ask himself with considerable dismay whether he should not become cramped beyond the possibility of endurance or recovery, if he had to travel all the way to London without the power of putting out his elbow or stretching forth his foot, except at the halting places. The gudewife was dreaming wistfully, with her honest eyes close shut and her kindly mouth

wide open, of a ship's deck as clean as her house floor in Leith, of tall masts and flapping sails. But Ailsie Hyndford was both wide awake and utterly indifferent to the discomforts of the situation.

The stopping of the coach at the first un-yoking and re-yoking of the horses, while the different operations were conducted with as much despatch as possible at this early period of the journey, caused a slight stir in the company, who had not yet settled down into the philosophic composure of experienced travellers. Some of the younger outside passengers insisted on getting down already, that they might comply with the orthodox ceremony of stamping their feet on the stones, though they could not cross the threshold of the inn with its swinging sign and faintly twinkling lights in the street of the little country town which kept early hours, and but for the night-coach would already have been plunged in oblivion. The

association with these restless spirits affected the poor old water-wife, who insisted, in spite of all remonstrances, on making the perilous descent. She went so far as to reject the final overture of the friendly Laird of Pitteuchar that he would rather treat her to one of the 'drams' which attentive waiters were handing up to the outside passengers, if that would induce the 'camsteerie' body to sit still and give no farther trouble.

The wilful old woman stumbled round the coach, peering in at the windows till she came to that at which sat Mrs. Hyndford, who immediately drew down the glass and spoke with her humble acquaintance.

'What a shocking draught!' cried Lady Pitteuchar. 'Close that window instantly.'

'I beg your pardon, Madam,' said Mrs. Hyndford, with careful civility this time. 'I will sit between you and the draught, but I must speak with—with my servant.' And she

put out her head again, and in spite of what threatened to be a return of the hysterical laughter, entered into an earnest colloquy with a person who begged her pardon shamefacedly over and over again, in the middle of his exultation at the success he had achieved.

‘There was no other way, Ailsie. They would have found me out, and flat and grat, and I could not have stood their tongues—so I even made Gillie borrow auld Eppie Montgaw’s cloak and mutch, as for a splore of his ain. They could not detect me in that guise. I’ll pay Eppie well for the loan, and I’ll face the Deil himself—that I should even my own wise bairns to his Satanic Majesty—when I bring you back Mrs. Ba’four with the best right of all to stand by my side, after I have broken the matter in writing to Kirsten and Hendrie. It was to spare you as well as myself, Ailsie, my love,’ pled the Judge piteously, not unconscious that he had failed somewhat in

true manhood and in homage to his Ailsie. 'There is a bag on the coach with my best suit.'

'Na, na, my Lord,' Ailsie would have her own way now. 'Since ye have seen fit to elope in a water-wife's clothes, I'll marry you in beggar's duds as you stand, or not at all. Do you even me to caring for your robes of state? It is you men and not we women who set store on such vanity. Do you think I cannot distinguish my Hercules's head in Omphale's curch, or acknowledge my dear lord and master in a cloak of freize? Are you not noble to me in the basest disguise? Do you not mind how Fair Janet, in one of the auld ballants you were wont to be so fond of, gripped the lover whom she saved, and held him fast, though he was changed to an ask in her faithful arms?'

It was as if she would have said but for the reverence she bore him, 'Has not your weakness become sacred to me? Shall I not hence-

forth treat it as though it were my own folly, and so screen it from less tender eyes?’

In the interval Lady Pitteuchar had suffered herself to remain still in her bewilderment. ‘My servant!’ she repeated. ‘I have brought no servant with *me*,’ as if her conduct formed the model for all feminine behaviour. ‘Pitteuchar pretended she would only be a burden, and that I should easily get an English girl who would be of more use—which might well be—on my arrival. But I vow this is enough to put servants out of fashion.’

‘A servant, quo’ she?’ repeated obsequious Mr. Andrew. ‘A very randy-like servant.’

The coach rolled on with its varied freight into the cloudy darkness which only the lamps, like two glow-worms, lit up for the scantiest space, into the unknown future on which no clumsy lamp of human construction, no small but marvellous creature of God’s creation—

only God himself could flash illumination. The horn, which the sleepy guard saw himself called upon to sound occasionally, as a warning note of the lumbering vehicle's presence, took a fitful and weird tone among the night echoes, as if it were blown by some phantom performer. The travellers relapsed into that folding of the hands in a compulsory apathy, which, in the absence of rude disturbance, night brings in lieu of sleep, even to aching heads and throbbing hearts.

But at every constantly recurring stage which like minute guns roused the travellers to temporary animation, the same singular performance was gone through again. The water-wife with remarkable agility scrambled down from her high seat, hurried round, and had the interview with the lady at the window. No chill of midnight in the northern regions cooled her zeal, no broken slumber of utter weariness lulled to rest her unslumbering devotion.

The attention—not of the aggrieved Lady Pitteuchar and her devoted squire alone—but of the whole coach company, including driver and guard, began to be fixed and fascinated by the persistent repetition of the unaccountable by-play. Whispers of feverish curiosity and startled alarm commenced to rout sleep's twin-brother, sluggish submission to fate. Grim suggestions curdled the blood of the most careless. But no tangible excuse had been afforded on which rising suspicions could lay hold to demand an instant explanation, to seize the eccentric water-wife, to put a detaining hand on the mysterious lady, and summarily expel them on the first opportunity from the ranks of the passengers, who would thus leave danger and terror behind them, at one of the wayside inns or provincial towns by which the coach was passing. A poor lady might possess an uncouth servant, and might speak with her at every stage of the journey on

their own private business, without the public's owning a right to interfere. The skipper's wife was physically courageous in her simple, straight-forward nature; but though she did not belong naturally to the speculative class of society, she, too, occupied herself with the puzzle. 'Mistress and maid who are so thrang, who are so fain to speak, and have so much to say to each other! It's mistress and man, I'll wager,' was the silent comment. 'Yon water-wife is six feet in her stocking soles, and she climbs over the coach-wheel a'most like a cat, or a sailor. No modest woman—and I've no reason to think she's not modest—however auld, ever thought so little of showing her cutes.' The citing of a sailor as an example suggested a version of the incident from her own experience. 'Dod! he'll just be a sailor,' she told herself, well pleased at the idea; 'ane that should have held a commission, since his leddy is a broken-down gentlewoman. They'll

have fallen down in the world thegither. He'll have gone off to the sea, ony gate, and risen may be from a man-before-the-mast to a mate. It is no ilka sailor who can take up at his own hand the skill in navigation of my Jamie. And they'll be in dread of the press-gang, poor things ; so she'll be convoying him, dressed up like a guisard, to some port where there is no King's frigate lurking like a shark at the mouth of the harbour. Eh ! I'm wae for the couple, and I'll never betray them though I should risk being held an accomplice.'

From the moment she received that impression the skipper's wife lent her humble countenance to the delinquents. She even ventured to speak a word of respectful fellowship to her companion and to offer her a share of the oven cakes, kebbock, and ale with which she had fortified herself, by the aid of which she thought to wile away the long hours.

In place of showing herself touchy at the liberty, as most indigent gentlewomen would have done, the poor lady received it with a warmth of gratitude that nearly overcame the donor. 'Your kindness at such a time does me good,' said Ailsie Hyndford incoherently. 'You are a kind woman; you are too good to me.'

As the first pale streak of dawn lent a certain ghastly haggardness, in the scared eyes of the sleepless travellers, to the aspect of the conspirators in one of their never-ending, always renewed consultations, Mr. Andrew Dundas, who had not been permitted to take refuge from care in three out of the privileged forty winks during the whole of the anxious night, found himself goaded by fatigue and worry to turn on his tormentor, as the humblest creature will be driven to assert itself. He would furnish Lady Pitteuchar with a stronger reason for her unrestrained paroxysms of wrath and

apprehension. ‘If she will drive an unfortunate gentleman who has been so obliging as to place himself at her service, well-nigh out of his mind with her cantrips, as if she were the only person in danger here,’ Mr. Andrew protested between his teeth, waxing vicious under the infliction, ‘by my word, I will drop her a hint that will give her something to cry out about—if she should swerve outright, the better for me.’ ‘Yon water-wife is a strapping jade,’ said the mild man, speaking low, behind the back of Mrs. Hyndford, as she was too much engrossed with her own whispers out of the window to catch the conversation within the coach that had reference to her and her servant. ‘I would not be surprised though she were one of a gang of gipsies; and the lady her mistress has such a pair of eyes as I never saw the marrow of, save under a spawwife’s bongrace—I’m wondering if she may not be the queen of the tribe buskit to represent a gentlewoman?’

Lady Pitteuchar caught at the dreadful word. 'Am I to be robbed and murdered where I sit? Pitteuchar! Pitteuchar!' She did not even call on Mr. Andrew to defend her, or to summon her husband, she thrust her head out of the opposite window and screamed loudly for so delicate a woman, to procure help on her own account. And even the brave charitable wife of the skipper prepossessed by her own gentle theory of the mystery, and armed with a panoply of placid common sense, shuddered at the name of gipsies.

Pitteuchar was waked up from a series of uneasy naps by the tidings—not altogether new to him—that his leddy was 'either in an ecsty or a dwam.' Swinging himself down from his elevation, with a protracted yawn and a bootless grumble, 'Sowl, man! will she no let a chield sleep even on the top of a night coach?' he said. 'What's the matter now, my leddy!' he demanded somewhat stolidly for the nature of the

summons, winking his yellow-fringed eyelids as he presented himself to the shrieking lady.

‘Matter!’ panted Lady Pitteuchar, ‘am I to be robbed and murdered in here, while you sit like Lot’s wife, and pay no heed, on the top of the coach?’

‘I never heard tell of Lot’s wife sitting on the top of a coach,’ objected Pitteuchar, who, like most of his countrymen, was intimately acquainted with Scripture, but whose criticism was finical to say the least, in the heat of such an announcement. ‘You are not robbed and murdered yet, Leddy Pitteuchar, and who is going to do the deed, if I may make bold to ask?’

Lady Pitteuchar would have made bold to answer him in the sight and hearing of the offenders. That imprudent couple might, if they had managed better and taken ordinary precautions, have lain *perdu* and avoided to a large extent the notice their reckless conduct

had attracted. But as it was, discovering that they could not hear themselves speak in the din, they were putting the finishing touch to their indiscretion, and rendering themselves still more open to condemnation. Mrs. Hyndford had quitted the coach in company with the water-wife at this untimely hour of the morning, and gone several paces apart where they might confer together a few minutes in peace.

‘There are gipsies about the coach,’ asserted Lady Pitteuchar with desperate calmness in the tremendousness of the charge. ‘One is dressed like a water-wife and is outside with you, if you would only open your great round eyes ; the other, wretchedly got up as a lady, is inside—actually here—with me!’ giving the last words in a succession of outraged gasps.

‘I can say nothing about the leddy, but the water-wife is no gipsy,’ swore Pitteuchar roundly ; ‘I can tell that much whatever else she may be—I offered her a pinch of snuff from my

box in the glint of one of the coach lamps, and she took it with a hand a hantle whiter and softer than my own. You may say that is no sign of honesty in a water-wife, which is very true—none the less it was no gipsy's hand, moreover it was not a young hand such as you might expect to find in a masquerade—I saw the fingers plainly and they were a thought lean and wrinkled. I'm of opinion,' announced Pitteuchar with the modest importance of a man who has made a signal discovery, 'it is an affair of the State. Some grey-headed billie, of rank above us all, has been playing fast and loose with high treason and trafficking with a Court I will not name, beyond the seas. It is a question for a Secretary of State and not for the guard or the driver.'

'Keep me! Pitteuchar, you don't say so,' exclaimed Mr. Andrew in high-pitched excitement. 'It will never be a scheme to carry off the mails and the Record papers in my valise?'

‘I will not pledge myself,’ said Pitteuchar cautiously.

‘And what am I to do?’ clamoured Lady Pitteuchar. ‘Am I to ride on with this plot not cleared up?’

‘Unless you prefer being left behind,’ said Pitteuchar drily; ‘and who kens how many men may be lying at the inns on the road, for the whole country is in a distracted state. I advise you rather to bide a wee, and play patience—for a change. There will be Berwick and breakfast at the next stage, and then we’ll see whether we cannot come to closer quarters with the cattle, and be at the bottom of the intrigue—if intrigue there be.’

Lady Pitteuchar was forced to submit; but the poor lady and the water-wife did not see Berwick on this occasion. When the coach came within a short distance of the debatable walled town which belongs neither to Scotland nor England, but to the Enemy of mankind

generally, intimation was given to the driver that two of the passengers had arrived at their destination, so far as he was concerned; and the coach was pulled up to permit the lady and her servant to quit the company. But, however thankful the passengers might be to get rid of the obnoxious pair, the circumstances of their withdrawal were hardly re-assuring. The exit occurred on a country road—doubly lonely at that early hour, where there stood neither vehicle, horse, nor human being to meet the travellers. No house was within sight, while two still more ominous signs of the position thrilled the nerves and daunted the spirits of those interested in the scrutiny. These tokens made themselves obvious in that dimness of the dawn which only lent an increased awe to their consideration. The far horizon was swept by the German ocean with its foam-crested waves rolling green and gurly, capable of rocking any number of smuggling luggers on its heaving

breast between the mouths of Tweed and Tyne, and in the shadow of the Holy Isle and Lindisfarne. The near prospect was closed in by the brown heathery waste of Lamberton Moor haunted by highwaymen after the fashion of moors a century ago. Both wild natural boundaries stretched out faintly but distinctly discernible, behind their shifting veil of spring *haar* or east country fog, through which the silver and primrose beams of the sunrise were struggling. In the stress of emotion caused by the sinister landmarks, a hasty proposal was conveyed to the driver to send after the retreating wayfarers fast vanishing in the pearly haze, cause them to return and keep their seats till Berwick was reached.

But the bluff captain of the coach with his sturdy lieutenant the guard resisted the panic as they interchanged roguish glances. They pointed out plausibly that it was already broad daylight with the good town of Berwick near

at hand. And when these specious arguments against interference with the liberty of the King's subjects, so far from stilling the clamour, threatened to raise a hue and cry against the very authorities in charge, the driver suffered himself to indicate by a flourish of his whip and a single observation, sententious in its brevity, that if Lamberton Moor lay there to the left—Lamberton Toll-bar rose here only three fields off to the right.

The effect of the announcement was electrical. The bent bow of minds on the stretch with morbid dread and ready to snap in the tension, relaxed instantaneously and sprang to the opposite extreme of keen amusement and smothered affront at their idle fears. The ridiculous side of the affair, in which, happily for private pride, the whole coach company—not excepting the experienced officials—had been involved, helped everybody to enjoy the sufficient apology so generally overlooked for

the cause of the night's tremours. Amidst a chorus of 'echs!' ohs! peals of laughter, and a light fantasia of jocular speculation, Lady Pitteuchar's solo was heard. 'The woman was fifty if she was a day,' she said spitefully. (Lady Pitteuchar herself was not above twenty, and let us hope she lived to grow wiser and more generous.) 'She was as grey as a rat.' (Lady Pitteuchar wore the last hair cap or young matron's wig.) 'Every bit of colour was washed out of her thin cheeks' (Lady Pitteuchar owed the high colour on her own plump cheeks to the prevailing paint-pot); 'she was a miserable old creature—a frightful dowdy, not even a fool of a man could find a word to say for her, save that she had the eyes of a disreputable fortune-teller,' she finished, turning in the most unprovoked outrageous manner on Mr. Andrew, raking up the single personal remark he had made on Mrs. Hyndford, and putting on it a totally different construction from what it had

borne originally. It appeared that Lady Pitteuchar had caught the doubtful compliment, and stored it away even in the middle of her frenzy, in order to draw it forth and launch it at the head of its astonished author, when he least expected the abuse of his theory.

‘Well, my leddy, you must own the pair are not ill-matched in one respect,’ said Pitteuchar, ‘for he had the hand of a greybeard.’ But Mr. Andrew remained confounded and sulky at the gross injustice which was all the reward he got for his good intentions.

The skipper’s wife was impelled to speak and even to contradict her social superiors. ‘You are wrang,’ she said with modest confidence, still cherishing her version of the mystery, while she glanced at the sea. ‘But even if it be as you jalouse, I thought there was ae thing on earth which never grew cauld or auld.’ She could not say more ‘afore folk’ especially in the presence of quality, and even

for the words she had spoken, a slight soft blush, a sweet sober reflection of her youthful roses, stole into the comely matron's face. But she knew what she would have done—supposing she had been parted in their fresh youth from her skipper who, as it happened, had reigned in the character of her gudeman for so many years that even a sailor's joints were waxing stiff, and a certain fine flavour of crustiness was becoming developed in the manliness of his temper. His stiffness and crustiness would not have weighed a straw with the love of his youth, if he had still needed her help, and craved her company. Nay, the staid gudewife felt shyly conscious that in such a case, she would have cared little for tokens which, when other questions were in debate, proved all-powerful to her womanly mind—that in the long interval her own chestnut hair had grown dim and scant, and her light, quick step heavy and slow. Her step could not have grown so slow that she would

not have been up and away to the Borders to keep the tryst he set, at the first wag of his horny finger. She would have plighted her troth to him when they were a careworn man and woman, as surely as when they were a blithe lad and lass—though the whole unbelieving, uncomprehending world had laughed them to scorn as they were mocking at this couple.

Even so on this April morning Lord Balfour and Mrs. Hyndford were made one in the cottage by the Lamberton Toll-bar—built so exactly on the borders of the united countries, with their widely diverging laws, that of the two rooms the ‘but’ is in Scotland, while the ‘ben’ is in England.

The deed done without ceremony was beyond recall—neither Miss Kirsten nor Mr. Hendrie, the Lord Advocate nor the Solicitor-General—not even the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, though it has always solemnly disapproved of rites shorn of its

blessing—only death itself could thenceforth part the pair. And Harry Ba'four, like the warrior Barak after the prophetess Deborah had consented to go up with him and meet Sisera and his host, became brave as a lion, to face his irate children from the moment that Ailsie Hyndford was his wedded wife.

‘HAMESUCKEN.’



CHAPTER I.

WAT BAILLIE'S ORDINATION AND SETTLEMENT.

THE coming ordination and settlement of the new minister of Birkenbarns formed a topic under discussion at the breakfast table of Birkenecraig, the house of Claud Kirkpatrick, the chief resident heritor in the parish, though not its patron. The latter was a nobleman long expatriated by the twin obligations of a damaged bodily constitution and a heavily encumbered territorial estate.

The speaker who introduced the subject was Bruce Kirkpatrick, the youngest daughter of the house, a gay, restless, discontented young girl, barely out of her teens, with the brightest

brown hair and eyes, and the most mobile mouth and brows within many miles.

It was an open winter, and the household had a considerable interest in hunting and coursing through its young master Claud, whose sole business in life—barring a little very badly done amateur farming—was sport in some shape. Bruce kept jotting down several engagements of the kind on a card which lay by her plate, preparatory to the card's being hung for general convenience over the chimneypiece in what was called by courtesy Mr. Kirkpatrick's 'writing-room.' Suddenly she stopped, held up her head, looked round with her keen bright eyes, calculated in her quick fashion, and alighted on a conclusion.

'No, not on Thursday to be sure, certainly not on Thursday. That is the day of Muckle Wat Baillie's ordination;' and her eyes shone and twinkled with a mixture of interest and amusement.

Her audience consisted of her brother, who was turning over the slice of kippered salmon on his plate with an air of sullen disgust though he had deliberately selected the morsel—and two elder sisters. These ladies were much older than Claud and Bruce, quite elderly women, though they had possessed the same parents, the four having been divided by a considerable space of time, and placed at opposite ends of a large family, widely scattered with the exception of the members present.

The two handsome elderly ladies in caps and shawls were occupied—the one in pouring out tea and coffee, the other in affectionately feeding with the choicest bits which had been prepared for her own eating, a small colony of clamorous dogs, consisting of a fox-terrier, a Blenheim, and a mongrel.

Bruce's remark met with a characteristic reception. ‘The minister's settlement be hanged!’ growled Claud, a peculiarly ill-con-

ditioned, sallow, sickly-looking lad, two or three years older than Bruce. ‘These black-coats make too much noise about their doings. I for one don’t mean to miss a meet or a run on account of any man-jack among them. I should not mind getting up a rival rat-hunt in the barn on purpose that morning. I am not going to the kirk on a week-day. What do they mean by all this row about settlements and inductions? Cannot the man settle himself, and have done with it, on a Sunday? I’ll know enough of his settlement when the striking of the fiars comes round—I should not care to go off to the English chapel, though that would be to pay the piper twice over.’

The elder Miss Kirkpatrick’s were well accustomed to the rude ebullitions of their darling; for Claud was their cherished nursling, whom they had coddled and coaxed through a weak infancy and childhood—in which he had the misfortune to be left early motherless,

latterly fatherless also, and brought up to such manhood as he was capable of attaining. They did not care half so much for Bruce the youngest born, who had always been healthy and lively, and had not given a tithe of the trouble in her rearing. She was only a lassie and the eighth daughter of the house, not that she also was not tolerably spoilt in her way. Five of these fair blooming young daughters—the Kirkpatricks, save for Claud, were a fine-looking race—had married each as she grew up, some well, some ill, without much nicety of selection or prudent forethought, and flown here and there from the parent roof, none settling in the neighbourhood. Only the two elder sisters, Miss Kirkpatrick and Miss Lily, remained, by some unaccountable chance, since they had been neither less lovely nor more particular, in their day, than their sisters, to bring up the fag end of the family, and to dote on Claud—the only brother, the heir, and at

last the head of the house. Claud had many claims on these soft-hearted, soft-willed women, rendered doubly soft, with their kindness not a whit soured by the significant circumstance that their father, the late laird of Birkencraig, had been a tyrant of the first water, and had led them as hard a life as extremely easy-going, not at all thin-skinned women can be made to lead, from youth to middle age. Claud was the single 'man body' left in the family, the chip of the old block qualified to take the reins and drive those who needed and really loved to be driven. He had been the puny petted baby and the incorrigibly lazy, greedy, disobedient schoolboy whom these fond women combined to hang over, laugh at, pretend to scold, and pull through his troubles.

The elder Miss Kirkpatrick could not find serious fault with their idol for his graceless speech, though, like most womanly women of their age, they had both become decidedly

'kirk-going,' joining in the exercises of religion with relish and satisfaction, and entertaining a proper respect—just tinged with aristocratic patronage, and their latitudinarianism in other matters—for their parish minister. The two sisters contented themselves with looking in a kind of admiring deprecation at their boy, who had grown so manly, masterful, and like their worthy father, just as the old-fashioned mother may have looked at the son of whose big oaths she said, with a little sigh, it was a hundred pities they were a sin, for, no doubt, they formed 'a grand set-off' to her laddie's conversation.

Miss Kirkpatrick and Miss Lily compensated for their breach of moral discipline in connection with Claud by immediately assailing Bruce—mildly enough still, to do the good-natured women justice—on her breach of social etiquette and good taste in dealing with the minister's name and attributes. 'You

must not call Mr. Baillie "Muckle Wat" any longer, Brucie' (Claud had been Claudie too in his time, but his sisters had long been warned off from such an endearing liberty). 'Fie for shame! You must remember that he is not only a minister, but our own minister. Indeed, I wonder at you for letting your tongue slip,' said Mary Kirkpatrick, as if her own tongue had not an inveterate trick of the same kind. 'It is such a bad example to set before servants and common people.'

'I don't set up for an example, I leave that to you and Lily and Claud,' said Bruce, with sarcastic emphasis. She had never undergone the training which her sisters had passed through from their father's despotism. It was only a feeble, fitful despotism at the date at which it did no more than brush Brucie's skirts. She had got a good deal of her own way, but had suffered quite as much from neglect as from over-indulgence.

There was a singular mixture of earnest regard and flaunted antagonism between Claud and Bruce. The irritable, ungracious lad was always hitting and snarling at her, yet he secretly liked her very much, and was prouder of his attractive, wild, witty, younger sister than of anything else he could call his own. Bruce was the only person at Birkenecraig who openly censured and defied the young laird, and sometimes loudly railed at him. But there was no lack of affection for him in her heart—affection which continued to have that strain of protection in it which loomed so largely in the regard of the elder sisters. It was because she in her turn loved him, that with her stronger, more independent nature, far finer than theirs, even in its warping, she was frequently intensely vexed and mortified by him.

But for Claud there was the greatest possible excuse. He never had been, and never would be, well, in thorough soundness of body

and mind. For this reason, in a measure, he had received the most deplorably defective education with which even a man in his position can make shift. He was naturally stupid, and under the merest surface-polish of gentle birth and breeding, he proved essentially and irredeemably a lout and boor. At the same time he was not such a fool that he had not a suspicion of his shortcomings. He was hardly fit for much higher pursuits and associates than those extremely undesirable ones, he was fain to choose amidst the apologetic, half-smothered disturbance of the elder Miss Kirkpatricks, and the unqualified wrath of their fiery youngest sister.

‘I cannot change my manner of thinking and speaking of Wat Baillie all of a sudden,’ Bruce was remonstrating carelessly, ‘just because he ties on a white choker and wags his head in a pulpit. I am afraid he will never be anything else to me than “Muckle Wat,” the

ungainly, shock-headed son of the grieve at Rintoul. He used to pull off his bonnet, make a scrape of a bow, gape and stare and run away, when we drove over to inquire about butter and eggs or corn for Claud’s pigeons, don’t you remember, Lily? His mother would tell us long tiresome stories of her college-bred son, whom she declared she would have been much better pleased to see an honest ploughman, as his father had begun the world, or at the utmost another grieve, or a land measurer, or, perhaps, a wheelwright, the two-faced woman! He was making another “schule-fule” of his sister Rachie. Then she would close her pompous hypocritical complaints, for she was as proud as a peacock all the time, by asking if we had seen Wat’s name in the newspaper in the list of prizemen.’

‘ My dear, you ought to forget all these old stories,’ counselled Lily hastily, ‘ particularly as Mr. and Mrs. Baillie and Rachie—I mean

Miss Baillie—are coming to live with the minister at the Manse, though I cannot say I think that is a wise step. I doubt they will impair his usefulness.’

‘A fine company they will make,’ remarked Claud, with a sneer, as if he himself were the best of company. ‘I wonder what their servants will think of them?’ as if he himself did not prove a perpetual stumbling-block to the stiff, pragmatical butler with whom even the old laird had not ventured to trifle.

‘There is one question on which I have no doubt,’ said Bruce lightly, ‘and that is, whether or not the Manse will be troubled with my company. Mrs. Baillie is a grumbling, conceited old woman, and her husband, whom she is said to keep under her thumb, is little better. Poor Rachie, who used to make my house-gowns, is far preferable to the others, in spite of the uncouth blueness of her stockings, and her painful bashfulness and incapacity for knowing

her own mind. But I say, Mary, Lily, won't it be dreadfully awkward to have my old dress-maker at dinner? Though she can solve a problem in Euclid, which if Claud there—I say nothing of the women present—were forced to attempt, he would shoot himself in despair, I am not at all clear about her knowledge of the right use of a knife and fork, as it was once taught in old-fashioned boarding-schools. What a pity they don't exist still, for the benefit of the blundering shamefaced Rachies who rise in the world! And shall we have the ex-ploughman and his wife also for guests, or shall we merely have to drink tea with them when we are their son's guests at the Manse? It is quite a complicated social puzzle. The minister ought to be immensely fascinating to carry off such a load of detrimentals.'

‘Hush, Bruce, you're very foolish,’ said Miss Kirkpatrick, again, launching her severest censure. ‘How can you ever hope to profit

by the young man's ministry when you laugh at him through his relations? I am sure you heard what he could do in his trial sermons. I grant if he had not been something quite extraordinary in his gifts and graces, Lord Branxton would not have been warranted in giving the candidate this parish where his origin is so well known, and where his father and mother lived in such a very different position.'

'Then you approve of concealment, Mary?' Bruce turned upon her sister with a sparkle in her eyes. 'You suppose the hole from which Muckle Wat was dug could have been hidden, and that he ought to have hidden it and introduced himself to his people under false pretences?'

'Child, I thought nothing about it,' the pacific Mary defended herself quietly; 'I only said there was an awkwardness which Lord Branxton might have avoided by another

presentation. But it would have been a great loss to us to miss the chance of Wat—of young Mr. Baillie. Why, they say he is already one of the best preachers, as he promises to be a leading man in the Church. We have always stuck to the old Church of Scotland, and not gone off to the English chapel, as so many like us have gone. You know my father held stoutly by his parish kirk, which he helped to keep up.’ Mary Kirkpatrick ended with pride and pleasure in the fact she was recalling. Whether the kirk would have held by him in every instance, whether he was any great credit to it as a son, were other questions into which the speaker had never presumed to enter.

‘Well, I mean to listen with all my might to the new minister’s super-excellent sermons and to be very much edified by them,’ said Bruce cheerfully, ‘but it will always be Muckle Wat Baillie who is preaching—Muckle Wat

who was wont to wear suits of clothes of his mother's making, and to stand up and recite verses at the school feasts. How can I help it when I have known the man all my life? The leopard cannot change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin, and a great deal better for him that he should not attempt the impossible.'

'Go it, Bruce!' cried Claud, much as if he were egging on a terrier at one of his rat-hunts; 'we'll have some fun out of the dominie and his belongings.'

'No, we shan't,' exclaimed Bruce, turning upon Claud with a flushed face and a curling lip. 'If you have forgotten whose servant he is, I haven't. Wat Baillie is a gentleman and scholar, whatever his father is, and I believe all the Baillies are very respectable people, which is more than can be said for all the Kirkpatricks, or, I daresay, for most families. You could no more meet him on such grounds, than I could meet Rachie on the footing of the

mathematics and philosophy which her brother has taught her. And do you think I don't value such acquirements, and the people who have won them against heavy odds—as you would say—though I laugh at them? I can tell you, Claud, I would cut off my right hand willingly to see you with half the sense and worth in your whole body which Wat Baillie has in his little finger.'

'Oh, go it again!' protested Claud. 'Just like a woman, never two minutes in the same mind—off at a tangent, safe to abuse a beggar—will make the opportunity if it does not offer itself handy.'

'Come, come, Bruce, you are speaking most unkindly and unbecomingly to your brother;' and 'How I wish you children would not quarrel, though you don't mean it,' remonstrated both the elder sisters in a breath.

'We do mean it—at least I do, for his good,' insisted Bruce, calming down a little at

the same time, and speaking wistfully, almost sadly. ‘Nobody tells Claud the truth except me. All I wanted to say further, was, that the new minister’s people are our people—Claud’s people; and Wat Baillie is, as Lily said, our minister by this time, duly appointed by the laws of the Church. In sober earnest we are bound to stand by him—in public especially, though we may not be able to help laughing a little among ourselves.’ This was said with restored good humour, and Bruce went on to explain in a friendly way, ‘I am going to swell the congregation at the Ordination, when I promise you, Claud, I shall be on my best behaviour. The assurance will be a relief to Mary and Lily there. I cannot make up my mind beforehand to be *dévôte* like a French woman, but I hope I shall not disgrace the training of my elders. I was so angry with that London girl who is living with the Kennedys for asking me if I was going to *claquer*.

Think of it, the man a minister in God's house! She did not mean it, of course, but even to say it! I was so ashamed, so furious! I am not so bad as that, I hope, though old Nanny at the Toll-bar believes I am not converted yet, but have still to get grace,' Bruce confided to the others, with a shade of awe in the middle of her candour. 'When I am converted she thinks I shall be as staid and solemn as she is. I shall have given over all my pranks and nonsense, and renounced the vanities of the world, such as balls, dancing parties, lawn tennis, lunching with the sportsmen on the moors, going to the meet, being present at a curling match, or on a skating rink. As if we had too great a variety of amusements, and too many of them!' reflected Bruce ruefully, 'in a neighbourhood where we are more likely to stagnate than to run riot. You tell me there was more doing when you two were young'—Bruce addressed her sisters with regret, well-nigh reproach. 'I

am sure I wish I had lived a little earlier, so that I too might have had my share, my day, till I was converted, if Nanny is right. I suppose the reason of the better times was because there were so many of us at home then, and poor papa was alive and could practise hospitality, since he moved in a good set—one that the women of the family could enter without disparagement—different from what Claud, here, chooses to cultivate.’

‘Do you suppose I am to choose my friends to suit the convenience and serve the ends of a parcel of women—a pair of old maids and a chit of a girl?’ growled Claud. ‘You may be obliged to me for allowing you house-room.’

Bruce was not listening to him, otherwise very likely she would have told him that he had only to say the word and she, for one of his sisters, would be ready to quit the house—which had been her father’s house, in which she had been born—the next day.

‘I cannot account for the dulness of the neighbourhood in any other way,’ she continued to ponder moodily, ‘unless all the more spirited people have been driven out of it by the supineness of the rest. But I fully intend to be loyal to the new minister’—she returned to her sheep at a bound—‘and I am going to shake hands with him in token of it. It is rather odd that I never shook hands with him before. I remember he had great horny palms like his father’s once. Now, for I watched them in the pulpit, they are too white and soft for a gentleman’s hands; but his ears are the same. Oh! don’t you recollect, Claud, we fancied they were like the handles of a trunk, that he could be lifted up by them, and that possibly his mother did lift and shelve him when she found him in the way.’

Bruce laughed with the greatest glee at the childish simile and the deduction drawn from it, which awoke an unwilling echo of

merriment from her sisters, even a reluctant snigger from Claud. He qualified the compliment, however, by the impatient disdainful remark, ‘What rot you do talk, Bruce!’

CHAPTER II.

WAT BAILLIE'S INDUCTION.

BIRKENBARN'S KIRK was plain, not ugly, thanks to the fact that the building dated back to a time when masons did their work intelligently and thoroughly, with care for every stone and pride in every line. It was a simple, very solid and enduring grey kirk and tower, both plentifully powdered with the rich orange of lichens, and ivied here and there to perfection. Kirk, kirk-yard, and manse were all peacefully situated in the 'how ' or hollow of the craig which was a distinctive feature of the neighbourhood, and in conjunction with the 'birks' which used to flourish there, like those far-

famed trees of Aberfeldy, lent its name to Claud Kirkpatrick's estate. The How of Birkenbarns was shallower and wider than a den or glen, and seemed to exist in opposition to the Bow of Birkenbarns, where the ground gently rose again, like a slightly rounded arch, forming a rising ground from which the sojourners commanded a view of the rest of the parish at their feet. Both were sweet, homely, rural places.

On the day of the minister's induction the kirk was crammed, presenting a sea of faces, mostly ruddy or weather-stained, from 'loft' to floor, from wall to wall.

The induction ended a series of ceremonies conducted with a curiously quaint mixture of solemn earnestness and half-stately, half-primitive festivity within bounds. Following on the licensing of the preacher—an early event—there was the ordination of the minister by a presbytery of brother-ministers instead of a

father-bishop. This included an ordination dinner, where toasts were pledged and bumpers drunk—all within the strict limits of sobriety, with the usual studied formality and comical self-importance, as well as the simple, almost boyish, hilarity of such banquets.

Finally, there was the induction or introduction to the pulpit, and the taking formal possession of it by its owner. As the last ceremony was always held on a ‘Sabbath-day,’ it implied the attendance of the working people, whose labours for their daily bread debarred them, unless they enjoyed exceptional privileges or practised great self-denial, from being present at the ordination. In Scotland dissent is not the feature of a class to the same extent that it is in England, and where the peculiarity is found it is among the tradespeople of towns rather than in rural districts. The more or less pronounced popular election of the minister, even under the

Patronage Act, together with the circumstance that, as in the Roman Catholic Church, he is not infrequently peasant-born, gives every sturdy ploughman and stiff hedger and ditcher an interest in the event. Indeed he is not slow to announce that he, no less than his social superiors, has a soul to be saved, and that it may even be of more consequence to him, nailed largely to the same spot of earth, and with fewer sources of enlightenment, that he should have a wise and godly leader, according to the pilgrim's judgment, to show him the road to heaven. Therefore the congregation assembled to witness Wat Baillie's induction ranged through several ranks with the natural predominance of the lower and more numerous grades. There was still here and there a descendant of Douce Davie Deans with his high mysticism, stern asceticism, and worldly sagacity. Unfortunately for the picturesqueness of the scene he had dropped

his broad blue bonnet and assumed a rusty chimney-pot hat. In the same way he had lost many a strong poetic phrase, while he no longer wrestled—‘warstled’ he would have called it—for the restoration and full performance of the Solemn League and Covenant. But the essentials of the old covenant were in him to this day.

There was also Davie’s double, an equally dangerous person to assail or defy. It has been suggested that from the times of the apostles clergymen have suffered greatly at the hands of ‘old wives’ and ‘honourable women.’ Perhaps if these could be heard in their own defence they would have something to say of the wiles and snares of young women, and women not honourable, but that argument is foreign to the present subject. There is a kind of female doctor of theology, who, if not confined to Scotland, is a marked product of the soil, and flourishes abundantly

in it. With some fine qualities of her own, she is also apt to be domineering, narrow, and dogmatic to the last degree, an ultra-Calvinist, rigidly orthodox, strong on the points of election and grace, and resolute in condemning the large proportion of the human race to destruction, for the glory of God. By natural force of character, and as a result of her undeniable virtues, she exercises considerable influence over her neighbours, and if she is not the minister's ardent adherent, she is likely to prove his formidable foe. She is Mause Headrigg unscathed by the fires of persecution. For that very reason she is less high-mettled and slightly vulgarised, but many of the elements of the original survive in the unconscious copy.

When found in the humbler class in the parish of Birkenbarns, the modern Mause was more conservative in the matter of dress than the successor of Davie Deans showed himself.

She clung to her great white mutch, which was, in fact, a modified version of the old matronly curch, though she now wore it 'at kirk and at market' under a black poke bonnet. In a similar fashion she stuck to her plaid shawl, which is the sole surviving remnant of the tartan screen, once universal among the peasant women of Scotland. Like the old heroic Mause, the dauntless old wife of the nineteenth century commonly retained her Cuddie, her big, blate, soft-headed, soft-hearted son or grandson, who, though torn different ways, and walking with reluctant feet, still followed the 'auld mither' dutifully.

Undistinguished by what may be termed historical traits, there were, as Wat Baillie might have been thankful, other sweeter, humbler, nobler types of character. There were 'sonsy' modest upright and reverent hard-working women, young and old, in whose scheme of life their minister figured largely,

whose sole recurring holiday, with scarcely an exception, was the 'Sabbath-day' and its cherished employment 'diets of worship.' There were manly, sensible, God-fearing men, quiet for the most part, but who could fight like lions in what they regarded as the cause of righteousness. It goes without saying that there were likewise specimens of stupidity, rudeness, and flippancy belonging to every rank, in the parish of Birkenbarns. Many of these were present on the day of the minister's induction for the express purpose of picking holes in his coat and recalling all that was contemptible and ludicrous, in their estimation, in his past difficulties and struggles. Mocking eyes would search for the negro peculiarity of his ears—the only negro attribute he had—and listen diligently for any faint flavour of peasant speech, in addition to the breadth of accent, which did not strike the natives, in his terse yet flexible and

wonderfully pure Saxon English. The hypercritics would watch for whatever answered to the dropping of an ‘h,’ or the intrusion of an ‘r’ on the tongue of a subject of the kingdom of Cockaigne, in the plebeian slurring or mouthing of consonants.

Wat did not take possession of his pulpit till the second diet of worship on the drizzling February afternoon, the inclemency of which had not kept back a single adherent of Birkenbarns kirk. In the morning a clerical friend acted as herald, prayed the extemporaneous prayers, read and gave out the well-chosen appropriate chapters and psalms, and preached the sermon for the occasion. All were pointed at the individual who, without levity, might be called the hero of the day, sitting, much stared at, and drooping his head somewhat, among his kindred in the principal square seat at the side of the pulpit. There was also a reference to the minor heroes and heroines—

the parishioners, who were to dwell thenceforth with Wat in close and, it was to be hoped, beneficial alliance. The speaker, while sparing the modesty of his friend, and dealing discreetly with what his own experience told him must be the prevailing merits and defects of the mass of hearers, contrived to accomplish two purposes. He pronounced an encomium on the new minister, the honours he had won at college, especially the credit with which he had passed through his divinity course and the zeal he had evinced as a volunteer assistant to a hard-worked city missionary. The veteran also uttered a sufficiently pointed exhortation to the lay brethren to do their part as a faithful flock, strengthening the hands of their minister by their prayers and co-operation in good works, giving honour to whom honour was due, and refraining from censorious criticism and refractory opposition.

The afternoon was Wat Baillie's time. He

walked in his Geneva gown, unsupported save that he was followed by his beadle, who opened and shut the door of the pulpit for him, from the vestry into the church, up one of the side aisles, facing the mixed multitude. He was transfixed by the challenge of the glittering blue eyes of the Davie Deans' and Mause Headriggs, touched and humbled by the respectful admiring gaze of lowlier saints, and chilled for a second by the stony stare and gibing glances of the indifferent, the feather-headed, and the already hostile among his flock.

Wat Baillie was a comely giant in his clerical costume, though the imperfections of his outer man extended to more than his hands and ears. He was heavily and rather clumsily built, in a largeness which lent ponderousness as well as force to his physique, and bestowed on his person when it was out of its sphere in the pulpit, or at the desk, a certain elephantine colossalness of proportion that

would have been much less trying, and more becoming, to a middle-aged than to a young man. Notwithstanding he was handsome on a great scale, and had something of the simple air and tone of the best society. For he had not only been tutor when he was little more than a lad to families in a position which implies hereditary refinement, and had stayed at universities both at home and abroad, on terms of equality with his fellow-students, he had done what was really more to the purpose, he had kept the cream of company by living habitually with high thoughts and generous intentions. He enjoyed a singular exemption from self-consciousness for a man who had in common parlance risen in the world. This advantage, which could hardly be over-rated—whether for his own dignity and peace, or for the profit which others might derive from associating with him—was due to the single-heartedness of the man, his devotion to the noblest

calling, and his comparative freedom from vanity.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of Wat Baillie's extraction survived in an inclination to put an undue stress—not on his own gains, but on the boons to which others had been born. He had a lingering homeliness, and—what was born of it and might be an inadvertent protest and guard against it—a slight formality and elaborateness of manner in social intercourse. These traits, while they checked, did not always balance or control each other. The last, which is old-fashioned when met with in a young man, is then generally traceable to such an experience as the Reverend Wat had undergone. In his case, his walk and conversation were so widely apart from sententiousness, priggishness, and pomposity, he was so perfectly unassuming and genuinely friendly, that there was nothing repellant in the flowering of frost in his air and address, though as a pro-

tection to a half-polished diamond which might betray what remained of its roughness, the frost was liable to melt away at any moment. When the measured deliberate tone was intact, it added to the meek stateliness still to be found in some of the clergymen of his church, very much in proportion to the depth of their consecration and the primitiveness of their practice.

On his induction-day Wat Baillie preached a good sermon, in which he declared his desire to be a true servant to his Master and His people. He disarmed the more honest and generous of his critics. If it cannot be said that the coarse, dull, and spiteful atoms who came to scoff remained to pray, it may be safely asserted that the inclination to carp and jeer was rebuked for the moment in the hearers who hearkened to an earnest man forgetting himself in his office, or, if he remembered his personality, recalling it simply as that of an

ambassador sworn to be faithful, a brother bound to be tender.

Bruce Kirkpatrick, in her dark ulster and sealskin cap, sat very still, and gave her whole attention to her teacher—rather than her priest, as he is recognised among his independent, pugnacious country people, protestant of Protestants, reformed of Reformers. The only time that her spirit waxed hot within her and became stirred to anything like strife—and the strife did not happen to be with Wat Baillie—was when she discovered Claud sleeping heavily in his corner of the pew in the front of the gallery. But she bethought herself that the day was murky, and the crowded church close, that poor Claud had no 'turn' for mundane, not to say heavenly eloquence, any more than for poetry, painting, or music, and would close through an electioneering address, or nod over an after-dinner speech, as impartially as at a sermon. So she forgave him, and let

him slumber in peace, relinquishing her first rash indignant impulse to dare startling him, and risk his swearing aloud in church by surreptitiously tilting her silver-mounted bible full on his toes, or digging one of its sharp corners right into the side next her. Bruce grew more and more serious, with a sweet seriousness that calmed and softened as well as sobered her fresh young face.

But as no prophet is without honour save in his own country and in his own house, so about the least affected of the congregation present at Wat Baillie's induction without even the reservation of such sleepers as Claud Kirkpatrick, were the minister's father and mother. They were truly a dogmatic self-sufficient pair. The mother in whose breast the weeping blood of hero-worship ought to have predominated, was like good wine fermented to vinegar, considerably the tarter and the more self-asserting of the two. The couple took the entire credit

of their son's really remarkable attainments, unblemished character, and sweet and modest temper. Wat was what they had made him. If they had not set him the best example, where would he have been? Who had toiled and pinched themselves to defray his first schooling? Who had cared for his highest well-being as they had cared all along? They were not going to let Wat assert himself, throw off their yoke, and perhaps look down upon them before everything was done. They would show him still that they were his father and mother whom he was bound to honour, to whom it was his duty to give place. It was all very well for strangers—scholars and dignitaries or not—to set store on Wat and make much of him, enough to turn the lad's head, but there were people still more to be considered and deferred to, to wit, Tammas Baillie and his wife Kate, who were Wat's parents and superiors to whom he owed everything.

The parental despotism would not have been lovely in any case, and would still have cast a slur on the boundless self-sacrifice, the limitless self-forgetfulness, the tender pride and touching joy of the true father and mother's heart, but at least there would have been a shade of excuse for it, if Wat had been an undutiful, even a careless son, instead of the most loyal, forbearing, and considerate of men-children. Some of his admiring and attached friends were provoked as at a positive weakness by the grand, faithful reverence and submission he paid to his father and mother, on all points which did not interfere with conscientious obligations. These friends ventured to remonstrate with the victim, and received such an answer, though Wat Baillie was one of the gentlest, as he was one of the manliest, of his kind, that they never thus offended again.

Rachie, or Rachel Baillie, atoned for the deficiency in hero-worship of the rest of the

family. That was the proudest day of her life, if she could but have forgotten her own disqualifications for being the minister's sister, going to stay with him in the manse, ‘hand-idle’ except, of course, for assisting her mother in the housekeeping—a lady, and ‘gude sakes!’ she was very unlike a lady—till something else happened. She listened to her brother's voice as if it had been the voice of an angel. She thought there was only one other occupation in the world that approached in glory, delight and huge profit to hearing Wat preach, and that was reading with him as he had trained her from earliest girlhood to read and understand the classics, and relish ancient and modern philosophy to the pitch of metaphysics.

Rachie had a great share of Wat's solid abilities; she was intelligent, and profoundly diligent and patient. She took a real pleasure in rendering a difficult passage and solving a

hard problem along with Wat. She was the best and most faithful of helpers and sympathisers ; but she shone only by reflected light, she had not a grain of originality in her. She was proud and pleased to be the companion of her brother's studies, but apart from the companionship, she had neither pride nor pleasure in the attainments which made the association possible. She would hardly even have cared to pursue independently what she still called her 'lessons,' any more than she would ever have carried out, without the previous necessity of earning her living, the calling of a dressmaker, to which she had served an apprenticeship, in which, in spite of her personal ungainliness and awkwardness, she had acquired considerable proficiency. For a mind so large and well stored as Rachie's could not fail altogether in a comprehension of just proportions with the beauty and harmony which are their result. Unfortunately, these fair pro-

portions were not to be found either in Rachie's bodily or mental composition. Wat, who had no brother and no other sister, had always been fondly attached to the great, uncouth, daunted girl, over whom her mother tyrannised. He had craved for his sister's sympathy in his cherished pursuits, and he had made her a prodigy of learning for a woman. But it was rather a monstrous prodigy, for he had not been equal to shaping and suiting her knowledge to her sex and circumstances. Of course he had been incapable of supplying her with any womanly graces and accomplishments, so that Rachie remained a gawky as well as a scholar. Rachie felt all these defects in addition to her personal lack of good looks, far more keenly than she entertained any gratifying sense of mental superiority, though she loved learning both for Wat's sake and its own. Indeed, she was rather ashamed than elated by a distinction which removed her in yet another

respect from her girlish contemporaries, which her sharp-tongued mother treated with the utmost derision in finding fault with Rachie's constant nervous blunders in Mrs. Baillie's department as housekeeper.

Rachie, it need hardly be said, had all the miserable self-consciousness which was absent from Wat. She was not less single-hearted, but she had no grand engrossing office such as his to support her. And she had much of that latent vanity which, when it proceeds from an anxious desire to please and a longing for approbation, is an amiable if not a very dignified weakness, and is often enough found in gentle natures. Poor Rachie's, in place of being an exultant and aggressive vanity, was a vanity very much wounded and crushed, causing her to creep about, even on the day of her triumph, in a humble deprecating fashion, rendering the timidity and vacillation attendant on her unbalanced faculties still more marked,

and threatening to sow in her naturally artless, kindly-disposed nature, baleful seeds of suspicion, jealousy, and contention.

In person Rachie was a complete caricature of her brother. She, too, was big, with a sort of blurring out bigness both in figure and face—a large, unfinished-looking woman, who appeared as if her clothes—of good material and not ill-made—were still no better than a sack, in which she was tied. She had a face heavy in outline and muddled in complexion, though it possessed a certain pathos in the large soft mouth—like that of the sphinx—and the mild, perplexed, protesting eyes.

At the end of the service, the minister who had preached in the morning mounted the pulpit steps again, and sat down for a few seconds beside his brother like two doves in a dove-cote, while the congregation remained in agreeable expectation. Then the experienced gentleman rose and delivered a smiling an-

nouncement that the minister of Birkenbarns meant, according to custom, to take his stand presently by the kirk-door, and would feel happy to shake hands with those of his parishioners who had yet to make his acquaintance, or who wished to exchange a friendly greeting with him on this momentous occasion. Accordingly, in a few minutes the minister was to be seen with his clerical supporter and one or two influential friends among the members of the congregation who had in technical phrase ‘given and sustained his call,’ arranged conveniently round the church door. There the crowd pressing out, paused for a moment and surged round the group that toddling childhood, blushing youth, staid manhood and womanhood and venerable age, might exchange a genial recognition which had also something of an act of homage. For the man or the woman who put his hard or soft palm into the

minister's did him fealty and gave him the pledge of a loyal subject.

Claud Kirkpatrick half-lounged, half-slunk off in the small minority that declined the pledge; but Bruce followed closely on her sisters in availing herself of the privilege of shaking hands with her minister.

The Reverend Wat's usual serenity was considerably impaired at this moment by his anxiety to show no respect to persons, to overlook nobody, to express his unfeigned gratitude for the general confidence, or what was styled 'the unanimity of his call,' with his warm interest in return in all the innumerable varying concerns which occupied and moulded the humanity around him. For he was fully persuaded that if he could not enter into the great mass of these concerns, understand their essence, and shape his ministrations accordingly, his presence there would be worse than useless.

His cheeks burned with crimson, his eyes—not large, but ordinarily clear, calm, restful eyes—were troubled and flickering in their positive eagerness to see enough and say enough. His mouth, that was wont to be placid under the moustache which modern fashion allows in ministers of the kirk, worked a little in the smile which had a passionate though neither a spasmodic nor a galvanised character. His hands, of which Bruce had said that they had become too white and soft for the hands of a gentleman—doubtless she meant a country gentleman—had the veins standing out, and trembled a little as they exchanged clasp after clasp with horny hands, flaccid fingers, small round fists thrust doubled on the minister's acceptance. His carriage was habitually erect and firm, without any scholarly bend, since he had gone in with his day for muscular development, and had cut a creditable figure in university sports ; but on this occasion he stooped

and swayed a little from the exigencies of the situation, and still more impelled by the agitation within him.

The two elder Misses Kirkpatrick thanked their minister glibly for his excellent sermon, and hoped he would often come down to Birkencraig.

Well meant and sincere as the words were, they jarred on the ear. It was not an entirely suitable speech in the circumstances. It broke the spell, and introduced something commonplace into the greeting. Birkencraig was not their house, as the ladies ought to have recollected. It belonged to Claud, who was at that moment shirking the interchange of salutations with the minister. Lastly, there was a suspicion of comparatively harmless but inveterate patronage in the invitation.

Wat Baillie had a perception of these objections, but did not care to analyse them, and forgot them in the very act of responding, with

his not altogether ungraceful or unpleasant shade of suave stiffness, to the courtesy of the ladies. His father and mother had served them formerly. He had looked up reverently to their not too superabundant claims when he was a boy. The two fair mature sisters were well-nigh old enough to 'mother' him, in the kindly English phrase.

It was Bruce who felt the jar painfully for Wat Baillie. She wished to say something different from herself, but the only words that came to her lips on a moment's notice, formed themselves into the most conventional of phrases, 'I am glad to see you, Mr. Baillie.' Then she added as a slight improvement, with more meaning in her tone, looking up in his face with the friendly, fearless eyes, in which there was not a grain of coquetry, though sure enough its seeds were in her, but coquetry at such a time would have seemed to her the next

thing to profanity, ‘I am glad to have been here to-day!’

‘That is good of you,’ he answered with sudden frankness, in another tone than that he had used to her sisters.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSES KIRKPATRICK'S VISIT TO MRS. AND
MISS BAILLIE, WITH THE TALK WHICH CAME
OF IT.

CLAUD did not choose to call on the minister, or to invite him to dinner, or, in short, to do anything which might have been expected from a worthy, courteous young laird who had his binding duties as well as his selfish amusements. Claud cared for nothing save the last—with some of which the minister, if he did not keep his place, in Claud's estimation, and mind his own business and his interest, might meddle a little.

It was not probable that the Reverend Wat

would approve of the petty annual races, with their not too petty concomitant of vices, which the young gentleman was determined to revive; or that the clergyman would not disapprove of the ancient, extravagant, indiscriminate patronage of ale-houses and taverns which Claud, so far as his example went on all public occasions, such as ploughing-matches, masonic and club meetings, crow and pigeon shootings, &c., &c., seemed anxious to restore also. The minister's mind and Claud's were not likely to be in unison on the comparative offences of poaching and betting; and as Wat Baillie was the older man by half-a-dozen years, and was now invested with the dignity of office, though it was only that of the parish minister, which he would be all the more tempted to exalt because he had risen to its rank, he might take it upon him to admonish one of his own heritors. The idea filled the lad—who was morally, though not physically, a coward—with aversion and disgust,

and he made up his mind to keep out of the way of his spiritual adviser as much as possible.

The master of Birkencraig therefore resisted with more steadiness than usual—for he was not steady even in self-will—his sisters' entreaties and persuasions, emphasised on Bruce's part by silent scorn. He maintained that if he went to the kirk occasionally when he felt well enough of a Sunday morning, put his shilling into the plate, so saving the funds of the kirk session, and contributed half-a-crown extra to each collection, thus maintaining the liberal character of the parish, and the implied energy and influence of the minister, he did well, all that could be looked for from him, and Baillie ought to feel much obliged to him. Let the fellow call on the women, with whom his coat had a natural affinity, if there was to be any calling done. Claud would see the minister at Jericho, and further, before he put himself about to go over to the manse and hob-nob

with the old grieve of Rintoul and his long-tongued wife and their ugly ogress of a daughter.

The Misses Kirkpatrick had to give in, and since afternoon teas were only a recent institution in the parish, and not quite suitable to the climate, they had to resign the natural and agreeable obligation of entertaining the minister. . Indeed, to invite him to that or any other light meal over which women presided, instead of to a substantial regular dinner, after Claud had complied with the form of at least leaving his card, did not so much as occur to the hospitably but conventionably-minded women. A tea with an ample allowance of jam, or for that matter, a bit of bread and cheese in the housekeeper's room, might have been good enough for Wat Baillie long ago. Nay, ordained English curates might condescend to be regaled at banquets of a strictly feminine character, but for a placed minister of the

Church of Scotland, his hostesses' parish minister, other treatment was called for.

The elder Misses Kirkpatrick solaced themselves by 'paying their respects' at the manse. Easy to please as the ladies were in general, the utter unsuitability of all, save one of the Baillie family, for their promotion, made a deep impression on the visitors, who were not without the feeling on their own account that they had endured a species of mild martyrdom in the cause of religion, by lending themselves to the anomaly.

'Think of the old wife's wearing a black net cap, to save the washing doubtless! And did you notice how Tammas wriggled his arms after he came into what they call the drawing-room, with its worsted damask and coarse rosewood? You may depend upon it, he had been sitting in his shirt sleeves, though he came out of the dining-room.'

The garrulous women had caught hold of

Bruce on their return, and detained her to tell her all about the visit. They were so eager to open their budget, that they did not wait to take off their bonnets and wraps, but sat—Lily getting over-heated in her fur cloak, and Mary tearing her veil under the necessity of getting rid of it—in the dim fire-light and breathless atmosphere of the Birkencraig drawing-room. It was a room of fair size, with a motley style of its own. It had the large windows of the second last fashion, but these were so much shrouded as to let in little light and air. They had Venetian blinds, which Miss Kirkpatrick persisted in regarding with complacency as recent costly ingenious inventions that could not be too highly prized by reason of the aristocratic distinction they conferred on a country-house—like an escutcheon on the occasion of a death in the family, and the saving they would eventually effect in preventing the fading of the carpet and win-

dow-curtains. Whereas at BirkenCraig the crimson carpet had long been faded into a most artistically dirty red, while the heavy satin curtains, which kept out a little more of the smile and breath of heaven, were equally subdued in their dulness. The fire was maintained there nearly all the year round. Where the space was not already fully occupied by little tables, screens, flower-stands, and foot-stools, the joint pet possessions of Mary and Bruce, there was sure to be found in broad day two or three of Lily's dog-baskets and cat-cradles.

‘Why does not the minister provide a parlour for the old couple?’ Mary continued. ‘He might give up the study to them and take the dining-room, which is a much better room—a good room, and would hold the minister's book-cases and writing-table as well as the dining-tables.’

‘You don't know Wat Baillie if you imagine he would bid his father and mother

take the second best in his house,’ said Bruce, who was listening to the accounts of the doings at the manse with lively interest. ‘You certainly do not know Mrs. Baillie and her Tammas if you think they would submit to be sent into the back-ground.’

‘Then they are standing in their son’s light,’ said Lily emphatically; ‘they are refusing to do what I for one should not mind doing, if it would be of any use to Claud, who is only my brother and the laird, neither my son nor my minister.’

‘And much gratitude Claud shows you for your self-suppression,’ said Bruce quickly, ‘while the minister never ceases to thank his father and mother for the favour they do him by living with him and keeping him out of his own. Do you know they sit the one at the head and the other at the foot of his table, while he is content to sit with Rachie at the side?’

‘It is a perfect shame and disgrace,’ exclaimed Miss Kirkpatrick, much stirred by this new scandalous piece of information, which Bruce had picked up in her sisters’ absence. ‘Somebody ought to interfere and put a stop to it. I would not mind speaking to the minister myself.’

‘Better not, Mary,’ Bruce advised. ‘Do you know what he said to Lowrie Wilson, whom he has taken for his man, when Lowrie ventured to hint it was a pity—just for the look of the thing, it was against the minister’s position and Lowrie’s position as the minister’s man—that old Mr. Baillie should yoke himself into the harrows and be seen harrowing the glebe like a beast of burden, as he used, when he was a ploughman, to harrow the “rigs” at Rintoul. Lowrie might have said also it was to be regretted that Mrs. Baillie should lay out the clothes on the washing-green, as I saw her through the hedge, laying them

out with the assistance of Rachie, when I passed the manse yesterday. It was Lowrie’s wife who told me about the harrows and her man’s ineffectual remonstrance, and about everything else, when she came up this afternoon to see Lizzie in the dairy.’

‘You don’t mean to compare me and the weight of my opinion to Lowrie Wilson and his impertinent officiousness?’ remonstrated Mary, slightly nettled.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Bruce candidly and dubiously; ‘I am sure Muckle Wat Baillie is no respecter of persons. I believe he would not be less polite to Lowrie than to you, and that except for your being a woman a good deal older than himself, he might be inclined to take his servant’s interference better than yours.’

‘Nonsense, Bruce; but you have never told us what the minister said to Lowrie.’

‘That it was his father’s pleasure to

harrow the field, so that though, for his part he would rather the old man did not fatigue himself, still neither he nor any other body had the slightest call to interfere.'

'Well, I never!' cried Lily, in a juvenile exclamation which was a favourite with her. 'The man is infatuated; now you need not preach any longer to me about allowing the bits of dogs to take liberties, when a grown up man, the minister of a parish, lets his own father and mother, two common forward old bodies, go over the crown of his head.'

'You could not complain of Rachie's forwardness?' suggested Bruce.

'Oh, no; Rachie is only too backward, and as silly as her brother on some points. But he would not suffer her to carry round the salver with the wine-glasses; he took them from her and handed them himself. By the way, he knocked a glass over, and there was such a commotion. If you will

believe me, Bruce, he begged his mother's pardon in return for her telling him the accident was just like him. A “cast” wine-glass, not worth sixpence!’

‘When had we wine offered to us on a call before, Mary? In a minister's house, too, where the host and hostess ought to be glad of any change of fashion that is an excuse for greater economy and temperance. I wonder what Mrs. Grey would say if she could come back, she who was the thriftiest woman, making the most show in the parish! She was entitled to both thrift and show, since her father had to live on his half-pay; while the family moved in the best society, and she lived to see her brother a K.C.B., and to give him his summer quarters at the manse.’

‘Touts! what do the Baillies know about the fashion, unless it be the minister; and he is not noticing—he is engaged with his own business, as he ought to be—the fine young man.’

‘To be sure, too, the wine was currant, and would go to nobody’s head, if it did not injure the stomach. I was afraid it might be bad port. Common people fly to port whenever they can procure wine,’ reflected Mary. ‘But I hope they will not bring it out to Claud when he makes his call, in case he should say he prefers spirits, which are not good for him in the morning any more than sour currant wine—I declare, as sour as raspberry vinegar,’ ended the speaker, but not before there had been a little fall in her voice and flutter of her eyelids as at a covert reluctant allusion which she was fain to conceal by a flow of words.

‘Why don’t you say at once, Mary, when there are only we three together, that Claud takes a great deal more strong drink than is good for him, and is destroying his only chance of growing up into better health?’ said Bruce, almost sternly, in her youthful austerity of

truth-speaking and impatience of wrong-doing, to which she had not the least temptation.

'Bruce, Bruce, I do not know where your tongue will lead you,' remonstrated Mary.

'How can you be so hard upon your brother?' chimed in Lily piteously. 'If you knew the drinking that went on in the days our grandfather, even you would consider poor, dear Claud quite moderate and temperate.'

'I know very well,' said Bruce, resentful with lingering childishness that she should be supposed unacquainted with anything within her sisters' scope; 'but men are not expected to make fiends and beasts of themselves as they did a hundred years ago. I do not fancy there are even many such sots as were quietly tolerated within the last fifty years. But that is no reason why Claud, who is more easily hurt than any other person, should drink more than is good for him still.'

‘You are a girl, Brucie ; you do not make allowance for a man—a young man.’

‘I do not see why a young man should need allowance made for him any more than a young woman should need it. What is his strength given him for?—though I do not say poor Claud is strong,’ with a little relenting in her tone. ‘But why should he take what is bad for him, besides making him stupid and horrid,’ bracing herself again to righteous indignation the next moment. ‘Why should he not be like Wat Baillie, for instance—not caring greatly whether he drinks water or treacle beer, or twopenny ale or the bad port which Mary says the class he comes from are so fond of when they can get wine? He is as utterly incapable as we women of abusing either whisky, or brandy, or absinthe, or noyau, or any of the abominations which Claud makes Nicol put into the liqueur-bottles.’

‘Oh, you little goose!’ said Mary, moved

to laughter at her sister's folly. ‘Wat Baillie is come of a different stock, and he is a minister.’

‘Well for him,’ insisted Bruce. ‘There are some gentlemen who are a disgrace to the name—Lord Sandy, for instance; the worst of the horse-dealers are not half so low and despicable. It was mean of Claud and him to go, under cloud of night, to the wild-beast shows and the penny dance at the Martinmas market in Sauchope.’

‘Child, you ought not to meddle with such things,’ interrupted Mary hastily. ‘Lord Sandy is a bad boy; but the dance was a young man's frolic. Goodness! Lily, how many such have not you and I heard of?’

Lily laughed a little too, shaking her head.

‘It was mean,’ cried Bruce, becoming only the more exasperated because of what she regarded as her sisters' Laodicean or Sadducean tolerance of the people and events that were

mixed up with Claud's misdoings. 'What business have men any more than women with such frolics? If Lord Sandy and Claud could go and romp with the boldest and giddiest daughters and sisters of ploughmen and carters, what should hinder me from romping with the most audacious and disrespectful ploughmen and carters? "Shocking," do you say, Mary? Of course it is shocking. But there is not one law for men and another for women. I say all that was bad enough—a most impertinent liberty taken with working people, which the most careless among ourselves would resent bitterly if they retaliated and tried to do the same where we were concerned. But if Claud were base and heartless enough to behave to any poor girl as they say Lord Sandy has acted to the mole-catcher's wretched daughter, I—I believe I could never own or speak to my brother again.'

'My dear Bruce, these miserable affairs are

not in our province,' represented Lily gravely. 'You should never allow the faintest hint of them either to reach your ears or pass your lips.'

'Then who is to be forewarned and forearmed? Who is to resent and redress the wrong to the victim if it be not her fellow-women? Is it all to be left to Wat Baillie, while his lordship would scorn to listen for a second to a minister? Lily, Lily, is this the way you strengthen your minister's hands?'

'You know nothing of the world, child; you are a great unreasonable baby. You have been allowed to speak your mind far too freely.' Mary was driven to a desperate, hopeless attempt to put down and sit upon Bruce. The next moment Miss Kirkpatrick's pliant, comfort-loving nature took refuge in the concession she conceived she had extorted from her sister. 'At least you are forced to grant our Claud is no worse than his neighbours. Lord Sandy is

not a good companion for him certainly, but his lordship is the Marquis of Kevoek's son—there is that to be said for him,' asserted Mary naïvely. 'The boy has so few companions he is compelled to take up with people beneath him often. His delicate health has always made him a home bird. The army was not to be thought of for him. In my father's day most young lairds took a turn in the army. They had their figures improved and their manners brushed up, besides seeing a little of the world and life with their regiments, even when there was no more campaigning. But I am afraid Claud could not stand even a season in town yet; he was so much the worse of that run up to the Derby,' ended Mary, with a sigh.

'There are young men in the neighbourhood, lairds' sons, who are neither good-for-nothings nor ministers,' said Bruce gloomily. 'For that matter, lairds' sons are above preaching the word of God in the manner of the old

Scotts of Balwearie and Melvilles of Carnbee. If we enter the Church nowadays we must turn our coats and take orders after the English fashion, with the hope of a fat rectory, or, if we are very ambitious, a lordly bishopric. You will not deny that the Kennedys belong to our class; I believe they reckon themselves a branch of the Ailsa family. Yet they never sit ten minutes after the ladies have left the dinner-table. The men among them are never flustered, or whatever you choose to call it, speaking thickly and laughing as if they were idiots, like Claud sometimes.'

'Oh! the Kennedys are well enough,' said Mary grudgingly. 'Their aunt told me they were coming out for professions. One of them is going to the bar, and another is training for private secretary to his uncle in Barbadoes. They sit in chambers and study all day long. That is not like being exposed to the weather and to all kinds of fatigue as Claud is in

managing his land and going about his sports. And the Kennedys are great, strong young lads—they were such coarse, rude, healthy children, they can stand anything.’

‘For all the good Claud does with the land—he lost on every acre last year—Mr. Govan told us, he might as well sit in the house. As for his sports, they are the costliest I ever heard of,’ maintained his accuser.

‘May be,’ put in Lily, with provoking philosophy, ‘but what is a man without sport? Why, I recollect when, next to a ball, I liked nothing so well as my share in the shooting and hunting. If I could not dance I could hold the candle—I could look on at the shooters, and ride so far after the hounds. I have never heard you object to doing the same on your own account, Bruce,’ she added, rallying her sister.

‘It is all I have got to do,’ said Bruce, with a great sigh, in which there was a lump of

exaggeration and a little bit of dreariness. ‘I am sure I do not care much about it; I always suppose it was different in your day and Mary’s, when there were so many of us, all young people in the house, and papa was alive, and there were more neighbours and neighbourliness. It falls flat now, somehow, but you and Mary don’t mind because you have had your good time, as the Americans say, and you like to take things quietly at last. I don’t complain of that if Claud were not so often unsatisfactory. Neither you nor I have ever claimed to be fortified for our pleasures,’ harping again on the one string. ‘I am going to walk over to the Bog-o’-mony-stanes to see the waterfall after the last week’s rain, but although another pelting shower should come down I shall get over it without artificial resources.’

‘You naughty girl, don’t expose yourself too much. Carry your waterproof, mind your

feet, and be sure you change them when you come in.'

'Don't stay too long. Remember it is soon dark. Your brother will not like you being out when he returns.'

With these mouthfuls of injunctions the elder sisters suffered the refractory, impracticable youngest to set out on a somewhat distant, solitary, and fatiguing expedition for a girl of her years and position. Of course the family kept old-fashioned, early hours, and the Misses Kirkpatrick had made an old-fashioned early call at the Manse, else there would not have been time for a long walk before darkness and dinner even in Bruce's independent estimation. It was one of the compensations which she appropriated for the disjointedness and topsyturviness which she saw in the world, and for coming into it too late for much profit and pleasure, as she was tempted to believe, that she took from the yielding hands of her sisters

an amount of liberty of action which they had never presumed to ask, and would have been indignantly denied if they had asked, in their father's time.

Inconsistently enough, but with great truth to human nature, Claud, who kept company with unfavourable specimens of horse-dealers and shady scions of the nobility, and made himself at home at any disreputable groom's or gamekeeper's, or wherever the indulgence of his under-bred tastes led and held him, showed himself much annoyed by Bruce's comparatively harmless adaptation of his shabby Bohemianism. Indeed, Claud Kirkpatrick, with his love of animal indulgence for himself and his considerable blackguardism, held rigidly correct views for Bruce, and if he had got his way would have kept his young sister under even severer discipline than the late laird had exercised towards his elder daughters. But a brother only two or three years older, who,

in addition, fails by his own behaviour to establish the slightest pretext for sisterly respect and submission, is quite another relation from a father, while Bruce had the making of another sort of woman in her than Mary and Lily Kirkpatrick had ever claimed in their youngest, most self-willed days. Bruce's sense of justice, strong for a girl, was simply outraged by Claud's seeking to control her in her habits. She defied him for the most part, becoming only more rebellious and adventurous, because of the angry sparring which her performances elicited.

It was all wrong and tending to still greater wrong. Claud was a man, and the head of his house; Bruce his junior, and a girl. But unfortunately his manliness and headship of the family were fatally compromised to a nature like his young sister's by his cool renunciation of his own obligations

and deliberate non-fulfilment of his duties. And Bruce was spcilt; her vigorous, not ungenerous or untender young nature was fast running to seed.

CHAPTER IV.

BRUCE'S SECOND MEETING WITH THE MINISTER
AT THE BOG-O'-MONY-STANES.

THE Bog-o'-mony-stanes was, as its somewhat 'gruesome' name implied, one of those waste howling wildernesses of peat bogs, intersected and overrun by water-courses, which after a flood rendered it a quaking mire or slough of despond. In these circumstances it was only to be crossed by the help of the 'mony' mossy stones which, by a happy natural coincidence, lay not sparsely strewn over the sodden green and brown surface. No doubt there was a season of the year when even the bog was not without its wild, fresh beauty. The flush

of summer brought its crown to this bleak, drenched spot as to happier regions. If the passing glory did not come with the blue and lilac bloom of southern marshes, there awoke the native tribute of flowering rushes and bog beans, rich maize-coloured and grey-white irises, dusky purple and faintly pink orchises.

But in winter the Bog-o'-mony-stanes was more desolate in its dank and dreary gloom than most sternly grand mountain passes. And it was then it held the greatest fascination for Bruce Kirkpatrick. She liked to go there on a grey day—a cloudy afternoon, when the low, heavy clouds threatened a deluge of rain or an ‘on-ding’ of snow. The inclination was not born of a touch of morbidness in the girl’s temper. On the contrary, it came from the very opposite element. The attraction was that of reverses, the same spirit of contradiction which made Coleridge’s young, happy Gênevieve love best the songs that made her

grieve. The allurements might have been still stronger if Bruce had been a happier girl, but there was enough happiness left in her buoyant youth to cause her to admit an inexplicable charm, which was not without its puzzle and pain, in the unrelieved dismalness of the Bog-o'-mony-stanes in the depth of winter. She enjoyed after a fashion facing the encounter in order to experience the revulsion—to wonder why there should be such a forlorn corner of God's bountiful earth, to speculate what the bog would resemble when it blossomed like a rose after the prophet's words came true. For surely the peat-bogs—not the brown, golden and purple moors—of the West had points in common with the sandy wildernesses of the East, and Isaiah must have referred to them also when he talked of the solitary place being made glad.

There was another broad contrast between the bog and Bruce's ordinary surroundings.

The first was monotonous with what might be called a haggard monotony, but it was not commonplace, and commonplaceness was the special invidious quality stamped on Birken-craig. It was a laird's commonplace mansion erected in Bruce's father's time, in a commonplace little park, where the trees, hardly older than the house, did not thrive well. The whole erection had been undertaken to supersede an old weather-stained house on a bare brae, both of which had not much more beauty, but they had owned decidedly more native individuality of character which is the next best thing, as became the dwelling-place and the site of the dwelling of an old family. The gardens might have done a little for Birken-craig, but they had only been enough cared for to rob them of all originality and luxuriance. They were commonplace modern gardens, of which the vegetables and fruit were respectable productions of their kind.

Mary and Lily with Claud himself took some pride in them and in the flowers—great flaunting dahlias and stiff bristling fuchsias, which took prizes at flower-shows at Sauchope, as the Birken Craig flowers had done in the old laird's time. It is difficult to render a flower vulgar, and there are gentle and delicate natures seeing into the very heart of floral beauty, that always look above and below any offence. To them the strangely and wonderfully formal and fertile lilies remain very fair, and the painfully puffed out, mathematically regular, ingeniously dyed roses very sweet, like their simple predecessors. But Bruce had not such lovely lovable penetration and innocuousness to harm in this matter. She could not take kindly to a flower which had been spread out, plastered up, hacked and trimmed, and then bribed to bear brobdingnagian blossoms. She did not care for the gardens at Birken Craig, which were chiefly Lily's delight. Bruce

only prized a morsel of ‘children’s gardens,’ which had descended to her and Claud a dozen years before. It had not been altered, but was still kept by its last mistress’s desire, to the mortification of Lily’s tyrant, the gardener, a blot on the dull decorum and matter-of-fact progress of the rest. It was a thing of youthful aspirations, tangled fancies, and semi-savage recklessness. It offered a fine mixture of woodland and orchard, flower and kitchen garden, and field. Here was an oak-sapling, there a young cherry-tree. Daffodils, poppies, and marigolds met and fraternised with herb-willow, queen of the meadow, and hedge vetches. A break of milk thistles and a patch of clover afforded indications of an old colony of rabbits. Stray plants of potatoes and turnips, even ears of corn, testified to the fact that the young gardeners had proposed to become young farmers also, to rear their own grain, which Claud would take to the mill

and learn to grind with his ten fingers and the help of machinery. Then when he had brought it home as flour, Bruce, who in the meantime was to have coaxed the cook to give her lessons, would bake it into scones and dumplings. Ah! if the youthful dreams had but come true, how much better it would have been than the present life. Be that as it may, the Bóg-o'-mony-stanes in the wilderness, which never approached sublimity as a mountain might have done, was yet far removed from the fault of Birkencraig.

The vicinity offered another excuse for a visit. Bruce often adopted, even to herself, the explanation which she had made to her sisters, of a taste that might be considered odd. It was a reason for her expedition susceptible of comprehension on this February-fill-the-dyke afternoon. In a plantation to the left of the bog, which was oozy and pulpy with the prevailing plague of standing water, where osiers

and elders were the principal growth in conditions under which mangroves would have flourished by African seas, the ground rose on one side and formed a bank partially drained, presenting a thick carpet of ground-ivy and periwinkle. In April and May primroses and wild hyacinths paid a pleasant debt to the fall of the ground. The water ran together and ceasing to be a nuisance and eye-sore, waxed at once ornamental in the shape of one of those white, flashing minor linns that often form an agreeable feature in what would otherwise be a comparatively tame or barren Scotch landscape. Having accomplished this creditable feat, the collected water went off with a curl of triumph as a burn too insignificant in itself to receive any more distinguishing name than that of the Bog Burn. But the waterfall was known to the country people as the Pease Heugh. No pease grew in such a locality, and there were daring etymologists who fancied the words

were derived from a broad corruption of the name of a famous foreign waterfall, though when, how and why the title found its way to this remote district, and survived on the stubborn tongues of the homeliest country people, nobody could tell.

The whirling pool below the fall, in which the waters seethed and circled before they settled to go their way, had a much more comprehensible and graphic definition to the unlettered vulgar. It was called the 'Cawdron Pat,' bearing a clear reference to the big, open boiler charged with scum and froth in which food for the cattle was prepared, yeast stored, brine for curing great rounds of beef collected, whey scalded, and even fat brose boiled according to the exigencies and festivities of old farmhouse life.

Bruce crossed over to the white thread of the waterfall seen through intervening boughs, and let herself be slightly sprinkled with its spray, and deafened by its hiss and splash. But

she really cared more for the brown bog looking lonelier and more forsaken than ever, under a watery sunset, in which faint blue contended with dim green, the yellow was dirty, and the momentary shower of red across the grey and slatey brown of the gathering clouds was the dull dying sparks of an extinguished fire, and had nothing in it of the regal splendour and calm of crimson and purple that herald a fine morrow. When the early crescent moon rose and glittered coldly on the surface water, making it show wan as the old Scotch ballads represent it, the bog would look a little ghostly and weird as well as savage and desolate. But Bruce, independent and a little reckless as she was in her long country walks, would not stay for the early moon. She would only rest a little on a cairn of stones. It was the single dry refuge near, and even that was forbidden to all wayfarers who were not bold and wary, for it was braided over and over so

thickly with what were now the bare and prickly maroon-coloured stems and withered ashen leaves of brambles, that fluttering garments had to be tucked up and gathered heedfully, and the thickest-gloved hand had to put aside the barriers gingerly, else the gown might be torn from the back and the flesh pricked to the bone. But if Bruce had not Mary and Lily's subserviency to comfort in their middle age, she could accommodate herself cleverly and with considerable enterprise to circumstances. She attacked and took her fort, cleared its summit, seated herself and proceeded to think in a desultory fashion.

Had the Bog-o'-mony-stanes ever been other than it was since the creation? Might it not have been a miniature vale of Sodom, composed probably of two or three labourers' cottages, a toll-bar, a shop of all wares, and a public-house, the curse of the rest, when it was visited by sudden destruction—Bruce did not

pause to inquire of what nature—and condemned to perpetual desolation?

Then she remembered hearing Mary say that when she was young she had been frightened out of her wits to go near the place, because there were old people still alive who remembered having seen ‘wul’ cats’ lurking among the stones. As Mary’s personal acquaintance with natural history had not included a familiarity with the genus ‘wul’ cat,’ she had imagined each prowling specimen equal in strength and ferocity to a tiger at least. Possibly it was a ‘wul’ cat,’ not a tiger which was at the bottom of the story that their grandfather, returning at dawn from some of his late engagements, on taking a short cut across another haugh half a mile distant, had seen ‘a wild beast’ drinking at the Sauchie Dripping Well, beloved by all the gude wives far and near for the excellent spring which supplied the coldest, purest, softest water in the country

side. There had been a hue and cry that a wild beast show must have been passing along the nearest high road, and that some strange and terrible animal had escaped and was roaming about, threatening the lives of the women and children in particular in the neighbourhood.

The Sauchie Well had been deserted by all save the boldest spirits for a whole summer on account of the startling report. Doubtless the cause of the desertion, if it had not been entirely a figment of the old laird's heated imagination, must have been one of the Bog-o'-mony-stanes 'wul' cats' magnified by a morning mist. Bruce thought of Lily's sleek ancient pusses and monkey-faced tricksey kittens, the formidable rivals of the dogs, and laughed a little to herself at these family traditions, then fell a prey the next moment to a panic as groundless and absurd.

Looking idly about her, Bruce's wandering

glance suddenly fixed and froze, though in reality she saw nothing. But she was sure she had seen something with the tail of her eye for an instant—something that she feared above all other sources of physical fear, with a constitutional, unreasoning, blind, absolutely superstitious terror. She fancied she had detected a brown, yellow and white appearance glittering and wriggling for a second before it vanished away among the dry stones amidst the labyrinth of brambles loosened and parted by her feet and hands. *It* passed out of sight in the direction of the shining, slippery stepping-stones she had to cross at this end of the bog, where fewer stones than usual were available, on account of the recent rains and the season of the year.

If Bruce's natural history had not been as halting as Mary's she would not have dreaded an adder in February, when there had been no fleeting sunshine to cause unseasonable heat,

any more than she would have ranked a wild cat with a tiger ; but Bruce was as ignorant even in country matters as most modern young ladies who have not had the advantage either of board schools, high schools, or local examinations. And it is remarkable how little any knowledge avails us when we are overtaken and overcome by a waking nightmare. Most of us have our waking nightmares, our fears which find us out and get the better of us by perhaps the single flaw in our harness. On such people it is useless to urge that the boom of the thunder is so subdued, the storm must be far off and the lightning harmless ; that madness in dogs is, in point of fact, a rare complaint ; that as a rule not one cow, not one bull in a thousand will turn and toss an in-offensive pedestrian ; that all evidence goes to prove mice are timid creatures, and will rather avoid mankind than have recourse to running up one's sleeve and down one's back.

Bruce's waking nightmare was an adder ; and when she had got an adder in her head, on the brain, she was beyond the pale of rational argument, supposing there had been anybody there to argue with her on her folly.

She could not go on in the track of an adder, not though she were to fail to re-cross the end of the bog, and must remain on that heap of stones, and perish with cold in the inclemency of a February night, when there was sure to be ‘wind and weet,’ if not ‘snaw and sleet,’ long before morning ; not though Mary and Lily fretted over her absence to the extent of bemoaning her as drowned in the Cawdron Pat, or eaten up, till her last bones were picked clean, by a stray, out-of-date specimen of the ‘wul’ cats’ ; not though Claud should rage, and stamp, and tear out and in, till he had to allay his burning indignation and lighten his bodily weariness by draughts of more baneful oblivion than that of Lethe ;

not though—oh, horror of horrors!—there was another adder lurking somewhere at her very side, for, as everybody knows, adders always hunt in couples, and when you have slain your first, the imperative call on you is to search for and impale your second. But Bruce, in her mixture of loathing and dread, was as far from impaling as from stroking an adder.

She had risen to her feet and stood fettered and tottering, her eyes filling and becoming glazed with unshed tears of dismay and despair what to do, when she gave a great start of relief and joy. It had nearly precipitated her—first among the perilous spikes of the brambles and sharp corners of the stones, and then into the bog's black water—it was only transformed into a dimly shining white sheet by moonlight, which was deep enough to have taken her up to the waist. That start might have done worse still and led to her fainting away on the instant, healthy young

girl as she was, by piercing the vulnerable spot in her armour and reaching the craven strain in her otherwise courageous blood, for it would have launched her right on the imagined path of the adder, which might have been not merely a cobra but a dragon to warrant Bruce's extravagant consternation.

The welcome surprise which had all but begun its good offices by accomplishing an immediate disaster, was the sight of a man's figure rounding the plantation and advancing to the nearest end of the bog. Bruce was by no means the most docile and deferential of girls, as has been exemplified. She was self-willed, perverse, and refractory, since it had not been in her power, or perhaps in her nature, to become strong-minded and self-sufficing. She had not the highest opinion of men, and the stranger might be the lowest tramp. If Bruce had kept her wits about her sufficiently to remember, there was frequently an encampment of

tinkers and gipsies in No Man's Land, the debateable field where four lairds' lands met on the outskirts of the bog. The new arrival might be a thousand times more formidable than the adder, if the adder had a being. But Bruce betrayed her woman's weakness in turning in the hour of peril to her natural support. She was glad of any man's company. She would rather face the worst man (the silly, ignorant child!) than an adder—most likely a venomless slowworm.

Instead of the worst the stranger happened to be the very best man Bruce Kirkpatrick ever knew—the Rev. Wat Baillie, of the manse of Birkenbarns.

He stopped short in amazement when he saw her standing alone there, like patience on a monument or Lot's wife, by the Bog-o'-mony-stanes, on a chill winter afternoon.

Bruce did not hesitate to hail him instantly. 'Oh! Mr. Baillie, I am very glad to see you,' she said, for the second time in her life, as he

drew near. ‘I want you so much to help me. But take the greatest care. Have you got a stick? No? What a pity! Why don’t you carry a stick?’ she protested impatiently.

‘What should I do with a stick?’ he demanded back again in smiling surprise. ‘I am not old enough to lean on a staff, and my hands can keep my head. Nobody has been requiring a thrashing where you are concerned, I hope? None of the ‘cairds’ has frightened you?’

‘There are adders about,’ she said, speaking in an awed undertone, which gave her the air of taking a necessary precaution lest they should overhear her. ‘Your hands will not serve you against adders, you ought to have brought a stick. Men should always carry sticks in the country.’

‘Will not the heel of my boot do?’ he asked, displaying with innocent ingenuous pride a heavily shod gigantic foot. Above the low boot

was half an inch of a home-knitted 'rig and fur' sock of blue worsted yarn, and above the sock the end of a priests-grey trowser, turned up by force of training, according to the stringent directions he had received as a boy from his mother, for his conduct on a country road on a February day.

The next moment Wat bethought himself, and dismissed the idle discussion for one of more consequence. 'This is not hay-making or shooting time, what have we to do with adders? What is more to the purpose and deserves greater consideration, there is fever at Sauchie Hole where I have been "visiting." We had better keep the wind,' and he moved cautiously from east to west, 'in the right direction, and leave a few yards of the road between us while I have the pleasure of seeing you home.'

'But I am not afraid of fever.' Bruce gave the assurance rather indignantly as, after a

scared look all round her, and something like a hop, step, and jump, she fluttered down from her perch, charged at the stepping-stones, and went swaying and splashing over them, alighting on the comparatively dry sward beyond with a little gasping cry that merged into a quavering laugh of confidence at her escape. Then she turned to look at him following her more deliberately, as became a man and a minister undaunted by adders—real or imaginary—and only concerned lest he should convey an infectious disease to her, so that he felt obliged to observe the course of the wind and measure the distance between them.

‘ Did I not tell you that I had no fear of fever?’ she repeated, with a quick accent of offence, preparing to cross the space between them.

He retreated before her advance. ‘ That is no reason why you should run any uncalled-for risk,’ he told her, decisively.

‘And why am I to be saved from risk which you do not scruple to incur? Surely you are a person of far greater importance than I. You are “a wife’s ae son” and the minister of Birkenbarns,’ she said, with spirits rising fast in their rebound, her bright eyes growing mirthful.

‘And you are Miss Bruce Kirkpatrick—Miss Bruce whom I used to think such a dainty little lady,’ he answered, slightly raising his hat. Truly she continued to look a little lady beside her clerical grenadier, and her getting up was dainty still, contrasted with his half rustic trim. But in spite of his formality he had answered more readily than she had expected.

They walked on silently for a moment. They had been familiar with each other by sight and hearing all their lives. They were now in an acknowledged relation more or less interesting and influential. He was her minister,

she was one of his people. But it was difficult to find conversation on the spur of the moment, unless the talk were of the most conventional kind, and neither man nor woman was in the least conventional by nature, though one was a little stiff by circumstances. The silence would soon be embarrassing, she must hunt up something to say—generally she did not fail in words, yet now she could only return to the remonstrance: ‘What is the use of pretending to be so careful lest any germ of the fever should reach me, when it would be a much more serious matter if it attacked you? Do you think you bear a charmed life because you are a minister?’

‘No,’ he answered, ‘but there is such a thing as walking in the day. I mean,’ he added, correcting himself, for he hated to quote texts as if by set design, or to express what might be uttered in so many plain words with a kind of sonorous spiritual rhetoric and mysticism,

‘that other men, doctors and policemen, not to say soldiers, have their duty to do, and do it without making any bones of it. If they face a small amount of danger in the discharge of duty, then, if you will forgive me for being grandiloquent, Cæsar will not die till his work is done.’

She was worsted again in a degree, and she did not mean to stand any more of this kind of treatment. She had thought in her supercilious, girlish way that Muckle Wat, with all his gifts and graces, would be socially at her mercy.

‘Women—girls like me—have no duty, I suppose?’ she said inquiringly, delivering her challenge with uplifted head and an expansion of the delicate nostrils.

‘On the contrary, they have a high and difficult duty,’ he said, with a twinkle in his eyes, ‘Milton recognised it as not beneath his powers—to wait. How are Miss Kirkpatrick and Miss Lily?’

‘ Perfectly well. Are they waiting ?’

‘ They are doing a great deal better,’ he said cordially, contradicting himself. ‘ They keep a mental list of all the sick and poor in the parish, and relieve them to the best of the good ladies’ ability.’

‘ I am sure they make more paupers and defeat the parish doctor’s aims to a greater extent than either the poor-law board or the kirk session,’ said Bruce dryly. Then she apologised, with a spice of malice in the apology. ‘ I beg your pardon. I forgot that you are not only on the poor board, you are the head of the kirk session.’

‘ Never mind. I have a broad back. I can answer for their offences along with my own,’ he said good-naturedly.

She was not slow to respond.

‘ Mr. Baillie,’—Bruce took him at his word, and made an accusation on the spot, with characteristic impulsiveness—‘ is it not abomin-

able in the session only to allow old Jean Lauder two and sixpence a week and to give Mary Johnson three shillings—whole three shillings! Only two and sixpence to poor Jean, doing her best, with that great boy of a grandchild, and three shillings to Mary, who does nothing in the world save beg, and has not a creature dependent on her. Why, it is rewarding idleness and pauperism.’

‘Just so,’ he said quietly; ‘it is abominable, and it is rewarding idleness and pauperism. But, you see, Jean, who is come of decent hard-working people, does her best, and earns a little, which the half-crown supplements. I wish we could make it more, but she would be still worse off if we were not able to give the small sum. I assure you we do not propose that virtue should be its own reward entirely, though there is something in that too. We mean to apprentice her grandson by-and-by, a little attention

which she will appreciate. We trust that he will earn a trifle soon enough to be a help and comfort to his grandmother. As for Mary Johnson, she is a beggar by profession and birth. Laziness and preying on her neighbours are in her blood. She would rather starve than settle to such regular humble employment as she is fit for. But you do not suggest we should let her starve—do you?’

She was not his match in a nice question of parish economy, somewhat to her simple surprise. She tried him on other and more personal grounds. Youth and girlhood are wonderfully egotistical, and however they may stray in speech and action to abstract questions, find themselves constantly drifting to selfish, individual topics. ‘You have never asked me to be one of your Sabbath-school teachers,’ she said abruptly, with a mixture of dignity and reproach in her tones.

‘No,’ he admitted, with some indication

of feeling abashed by the direct home-thrust.

‘Of course I have not.’

‘Why, of course?’ she turned upon him like lightning. ‘I believe you think I am not fit.’

If Wat Baillie had been a faultless man of perfectly unblemished mental candour, he would have answered that he could not bring himself to regard the ‘little Miss Bruce’ of old, still as thoughtless, quick, haughty, frank, and full of mischief by turns, as he ever remembered her, in the light of a toiling drudging Sunday-school teacher worthy of the name, who should be brought in close contact with her share of dull, disagreeable, sometimes dirty, repulsive, dangerously impregnated childhood. He did not think the elder Misses Kirkpatrick would like the experience for their young sister. He could almost pledge himself Claud Kirkpatrick would regard the arrangement as extremely objectionable, and would do his

best to forbid it. If Wat had been a still better man than he was, and less affected on this point by early partiality and prejudices hard to eradicate, he would have seen that there was no actual disparity between Bruce and the office she spoke off, any more than there was between his sister Rachie and a similar work. Whether Bruce were fit or not, which was a very different question, she could not be more honourably engaged than in such a service. Being wholly and rather foolishly wrong in this matter, Wat Baillie, the most straightforward of men in general, was guilty of temporising and equivocating. ‘Do you think yourself you are fit?’ he inquired evasively.

She looked at him with a puzzled, hurt expression. ‘You think I am fit to be a member of the Church,’ she said hastily, and then stopped short as if she were approaching too serious a topic. No doubt he was what in

other countries would be called her spiritual director, but her fine perceptions enabled her to judge correctly that there were subjects which he would be altogether unjustified in approaching, unless in the gravest mood, at the proper time, and in the proper place. Indeed even then she was not certain that there would not be an incongruity and indelicacy in her discussing them with Wat Baillie, a man not so much older than herself, to whom she had only spoken once or twice, and on the last occasion with the intention of teasing him, though by one of the transitions which were natural to her she was in earnest now. The man, in Bruce's Scotch Presbyterian eyes, loomed larger than the minister, and was not set apart by his functions.

He felt compelled to lay down a theory, though he ought to have known in his heart it was not particularly applicable to the present case—all the same it might help him out of a

difficulty. ‘ Sabbath-school teaching and district visiting have been made—most erroneously to my mind, like church attendance—tests of worthy Christian profession. Nothing can well be narrower, sillier, falser, it seems to me.’

‘ In the case of church attendance we are bidden not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together,’ put in Bruce promptly.

‘ Certainly, but it reads like an incidental recommendation, solemn and binding no doubt, and we can conceive still more solemn and binding when it applied to a handful of men and women who met at the risk of their lives in a heathen world. Still the injunction is not particularly and continually insisted upon, like “righteousness and temperance,” for instance. The assembling together is expedient, even highly expedient, and it is sanctioned and enforced by the practice of the whole of Christendom throughout these eighteen centuries; yet I insist the obligation is not

absolutely imperative. To put church attendance in the place of a good and honest heart and blameless life—to elect church attendance, which is as much a privilege as a duty, into an eleventh commandment, and to magnify its importance till it is reckoned the first rather than the eleventh, is rank pharisaism and a terrible blunder, fruitful in hypocrisy, both conscious and unconscious.’

Bruce shook her head in a spirit of contradiction rather than from principle.

‘In proof of what I say,’ went on Wat, warming to his argument, ‘I will undertake to show you Christians who, for some good end, or from some peculiar obstacle, appear rarely in our places of public worship, who are at least as true to their standard of Christian life as the most regular church-goers among us. One of the best men I ever knew never entered a church, because he believed every Christian house to be a church and every Christian man

a priest. As to teaching, it is surely possible for us to understand that the command to go and teach everywhere may, nay, must, have had a different and more definite significance when the elementary facts and principles of Christianity were almost unknown, and there were, as I said, but a handful of Christian men and women in a heathen world.’

‘Are there so many real Christians now?’ asked Bruce cynically.

‘That inquiry is begging the question,’ he told her. ‘You will not refuse to admit that Christian knowledge is spread abroad in this country for instance, and you may be able to believe in relation to it that another sort of instruction may be required—the time for a higher, subtler, more powerful, and enduring form of teaching may have come. Certainly every idle, even every busy, man and woman is not qualified to be personally and individually a teacher, or a Bible reader, or an adviser of the poor, though

many worthy people seem to believe so. Indeed these duties to be discharged profitably require special qualifications and a distinct training like most other duties that are at all well done so as to be of real use. Odd, isn't it, that the Christian world has taken it so largely into its head that anybody, in any circumstances, with the most unsuitable antecedents, can take up beneficially the most delicate, difficult attitude human beings can assume with success towards each other, towards even the youngest among their fellows ?'

Bruce laughed a little, but he did not mind her.

'It is like the wholesale printing and distributing in Christian countries of the strongest and the weakest, the wisest and the most foolish religious appeals called tracts,' he rode off on a fresh hobby. 'These are scattered broadcast, so that as often as not a tract against profane swearing falls into

the hands of a woman who never dreamt of swearing in her life; a second tract against love of dress becomes the possession of a slovenly old pauper; and a third, calling on the recipient to pause in his headlong career of vice, repent and prepare to meet his Judge before it is too late, alights at the feet of a well-living, humble, godly man, who has been repenting and preparing for many a year, and is much nearer the kingdom of heaven than the author of the tract. It is a great scandalous waste of money, paper, type, and misplaced self-devotion and diligence, with infinitesimal results—of course the nail is hit on the head sometimes—except in the form of huge indifference or blatant ridicule.’

‘ But what would you have, Mr. Baillie?’ objected Bruce with a puzzled air.

‘ Well, there are few born and developed counsellors of old and young, while there are, let us be thankful, many fine, modest

men and women, Christians in more than name, proclaiming the living gospel by silent example. If we took our religion into our daily occupations, and let them be penetrated through and through with it, do you think we should want many more teachers, preachers, or tracts? My occupation, for which, by the way, I had—however badly I may illustrate it, a long course of study and elaborate preparation, would be gone for the most part. It would be honourably superseded. Will you ever forgive me, Miss Bruce, for having preached a sermon to you out of the pulpit?’

The question was not of forgiveness, it was of the possibility of a young girl who argued in a round, the centre of which was her personal interests and prepossessions, comprehending the large-minded generalisation of a large-minded man, whatever his errors or mistakes. Neither was it strange and unnatural that Wat Baillie, with his slowness and method in or-

dinary conversation, should break into such an eager, enthusiastic harangue. Here was no phenomenon. Men like him who are unready and artificial with the small weapons of small talk, prove the very men who are in danger of preaching sermons out of the pulpit, without the slightest hesitation, or a single diffident blush.

With a vague sense that he had gone beyond his hearer's reach, Wat returned to personalities without waiting for her pardon. 'To tell the truth, I do not much approve of promiscuous teaching. Birkenbarns is not a very populous parish, and it is not specially strong in children. As far as I see, I can easily overtake them myself, with the aid of Rachie, whom I can coach, and the board-school mistress, who has been trained and accustomed to teach. Why should I go about the parish beating up for recruits to save my laziness by trying amateur teaching on some

seventy or eighty children? I should like to see more home teaching. I would gladly set that a-going. The chief good to be got from rough and ready volunteer teaching, to counteract its evils of ignorance, rashness, unsteadiness, conceit, and bigotry, so far as I have seen it, is to bring different classes and ages together, and to awaken and maintain a genuine kindly fellow-feeling between them. But in Birkenbarns, happily, everybody knows everybody already, and is not unwilling to rejoice or weep with his or her neighbour. Why should I disturb the time-honoured primitive relations for others which may not be better or nearly so good?’

She was not satisfied. Her woman’s wit—of which she had a superabundance—told her that he had not been entirely sincere with her, so far as the argument touched herself. It rankled in Bruce’s mind that though Wat Baillie had spoken to her quite seriously and at some

length, even propounding his theories to her, still he looked upon her as a frivolous, untrustworthy person ; a heedless madcap in one light, a fastidious fine lady in another.

Bruce parted from her minister, feeling bound to revenge herself in justifying his bad opinion of her. She would show him what a wild, regardless girl she could be, and then perhaps he would feel a little sorry that he had put it into her head by betraying to her so plainly the little he expected from her, and rating her as made of different clay from him and Rachie.

'Wait,' indeed ! That was like Claud's tyranny. Sit at home and not presume to take liberties that were not becoming her sex, age, and condition, while her brother did exactly as he liked, and he was not given to like what was good. But she would let Wat Baillie see that if she were not competent to instruct and edify a child, she could play mischief when the in-

clination impelled her; nothing very bad, nothing to do herself or any other person real harm, but enough to make him stand still and stare.

CHAPTER V.

THE MINISTER’S LOT.

LIFE in the manse of Birkenbarns was to the young minister, at least at this period of his life, a very satisfactory, most enjoyable process. He had outlived the chimeras and stumbling-blocks, the unconscionable demands and baffling disappointments of early youth. He had not attained his present standpoint without first facing hard wrestlings and falls; encounters which if a true man and minister ever escaped them, he could not avoid in those days of universal questionings—profound and agonised on the one hand, pert and complacent on the other, of upheaved and tempest-tossed theo-

logical dogmas. But he had still the elastic spirits of a young man, and what to an old man might have been killing warfare, was to his junior only grand discipline. He had the noblest calling a man can claim—that of challenging and meeting in single combat the devouring dragons of ungodliness, false Christianity, and unrighteousness. When all the dragons were slain, when every man had become a dragon-killer in the name of a greater than St. George—that seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head, then, as Wat Baillie had said, his occupation would be gone in a great measure. But the time for that glorious climax was still far off, as were the days when the sword should be beaten into a ploughshare and the spear into a pruning-hook, and man should go to war no more. In the meantime what could a man ask better than to advance the kingdom of heaven by fighting the forces of evil—dealing a blow here and a

wound there, even though he received hurts on his own account, and came off apparently worsted from many an onset?

Wat Baillie, with his simple kindly nature and his vigorous intellectual tastes, felt himself literally loaded with blessings—the one load no man kicks against.

He had been appointed or presented to the parish by an autocratic patron, and summoned by a unanimous call from the parishioners. It was a remarkable circumstance in his history that though he was anything rather than a commonplace man—on the contrary was original by nature, and held independent views, did not rant or indulge in sensational eloquence, did not identify himself with this or that popular party-cry, and was a good deal inclined, like the Apostle Paul before him, to preach unwelcome ‘moral essays’ in addition to welcome ‘evangelical discourses;’ although

he was a self-made man whose rise in the world might be regarded as in some respects a mortification and reproach to those he left behind him, he was generally respected and liked, and continued in harmony with his parishioners.

The explanation was that under all the elements of difference there remained the touch of the higher nature, which makes all seekers after the truth—nay, the whole world of humanity—kin. Wat might perplex, offend, dismay, and confound his hearers sometimes—no thoughtful earnest man can help doing so; but in spite of such discord, there was the dawning of a great concord between them, in the ethereal spark of love to God and love to man in Wat, kindled by his Lord and Master, who displeased multitudes and roused them into more than one frenzy of opposition, but of whom it could still be said that the common people heard Him gladly. The pre-

sence or absence of such a living and life-giving spark in any preacher of any church, whether high or low, narrow or broad, makes all the difference between the existence and non-existence of the electric current which charges the conductor and flashes the message from heart to heart.

Wat Baillie's elders were also with him. These consisted principally of a seriously inclined laird, the parish schoolmaster, who was also session clerk, a man thoroughly respectable, moderate and cautious in every aspect; a medical man, more pawky than devout; two sincere but rather polemical farmers; an honest, fervent, fanatical riddle-maker, who desired to spend his evenings in lay preaching in the parish, and did unquestionable good among an order of minds in one class, while he did unquestionable harm in others; and a susceptible imitative shepherd, who was unconscious of any hypocrisy in copying closely

the last-mentioned office-bearer, though he did not attain to his powers of persuasion and consequent influence.

All these brethren were more or less exercised about Wat in the soundness and success of his ministry. He was their minister doubtless, but they were his elders in age as in office, and they felt, more or less, that as members of a republican kirk they were in their places to keep guard over him, to be a check on his intellectual tendencies and ministerial actions. But though he raised a troubled doubt occasionally, now in one, now in another, the conviction remained and grew on them that young Mr. Baillie was of the right sort, a good and faithful servant, to the best of his knowledge, of his and their Master. Their loyalty prevailed and increased. The gain this was can only be properly appreciated by an unfortunate Scotch minister who has struggled long and fruitlessly with

a set of antagonistic, refractory, densely prejudiced elders—perhaps left to him as a legacy by his predecessor. The elder or lay element has its advantages in a popular democratic church—which is, notwithstanding this characteristic, liable to become a prey to priestcraft, but like every other human institution, it has also heavy drawbacks. The elder question in Scotland is something altogether different from the farmer difficulty in England, which caused some enthusiastic young members to say one day, with a sigh, that a rural parish would be paradisaical were it not for the farmers. The kirk session is more like a council of cardinals with the pope at its head—only the Scotch pope is never *admitted* to be infallible. The session may deal either with spiritual or mundane matters, and that accredited non-infallibility of the pope, together with the spiritual eminence of each of the cardinals, causes an equality which, however comely and

excellent a principle in itself, holds always the seeds of revolution in it.

Wat's lines were cast in pleasant places. All the parish, including the most contradictory seceders, agreed that Birkenbarns kirk and manse made up 'a bonnie pairt.' The beetling Craig rose close at hand. The big hummock was covered with heather, juniper, and blae-berry bushes, and crowned by natural battlements of blue-grey rock, sown with red and yellow lichen, and embroidered with an occasional tuft of wild strawberries, cranesbill geraniums, and nodding harebells. The Craig was a refuge for the conies and the heather linnets. Wild goats would have leapt there had wild goats belonged to the fauna of modern Scotland. As it was, the Craig lent a touch of wild nature to the pleasant domestic scene, rising right behind the old-world grey-stone kirk—itsself lichen-covered and ivy-draped—and the manse.

There was no adjoining hamlet of the living, though there were the homes of the dead in the green, daisy-strewn kirkyard. The last was not desecrated as it might have been near a village, though, indeed, ignorant strangers are given to attribute an offence of the past to the present generation. There are neglected, ill-kept churchyards both in Scotland and England, but though the former country may not supply so many models of flower-gardens among the tombs, many of its lone, quiet, hill-side or valley kirkyards may challenge comparison in every appropriate attribute of solemnity, peace, and simplicity with any God's acre in Christendom. In the same light the rudest shepherd's, ploughman's, or fisherman's funeral among the hills or the leas, or by the sea-shore, may be conducted with seemly reverence and deep feeling. In Scotland 'men are rude and speak their minds,' but it is a shallow as well as a gross error which

confuses the absence of weak sentimental demonstrations with the presence of coarse stoicism, and scatters broadcast the repulsive accusation of disrespect and indifference to their dead on the representatives of a nation that has shown itself, over and over again, capable of ardent passion, strong fidelity, and semi-quixotic devotion to persons and causes which have passed away.

The Manse of Birkenbarns was an ordinary enough square house of free-stone, with roses clipped and snipped and snubbed, not allowed to grow too high or too near the windows, on the front with its southern exposure, and on the gable which looked to the west. But it was saved from mediocrity or worse by its agreeable situation—kirk and kirkyard, manse and manse garden lying nestling together in the ‘how’ of the Craig, looking up to it at all seasons and borrowing from it shelter and sweetness. The manse garden was all that

a manse garden should be, for ministers, like the monks of the past, and like the shoemakers and weavers of the present, have been noted, along with the soundest and gentlest natures in every class and vocation, for an addiction to gardening. A book called ‘The Manse Garden,’ ably written by a minister of the Kirk, used to be the standard Scotch authority for the best simple gardening adapted to the needs of middle-class folk with limited grounds and means. The garden at Birkenbarns was both sunny and shady, protected from the north and east winds by the Craig. It was fertile from long cultivation, former ministers having been good gardeners. It was profuse in useful vegetables and fruit, screened away by some simple device of sweet-peas and hollyhocks and sweet-briar hedge. It abounded in common favourite flowers and shrubs, with here and there a rare tree or bush or blossom, carefully reared and acclimatised and proudly cherished

as trophies of the gardener's skill, and seed mindfully sent to the reigning minister by kindred, or former parishioners gone abroad or settled in the colonies. This manse garden did not make a great appearance at flower shows, as its owners had not in general gone in for the production of over-grown monstrosities and specialities, but it had in its time added its stores to those of many a cottage garden, furnishing treats for the dwellers in hovels and garrets, and invariably supplying the cherries and gooseberries, apples and pears for summer and winter school feasts. It had that quintessence of beauty in a garden, a sloping bank to a little stream, no other than a thread of the Bog Burn, which ran along by the strawberry beds at the foot of the garden, but still within its four fruit-laden walls. Wat Baillie, without having recourse to his glebe, had a considerable space of garden wherein to stroll and meditate, like Isaac, at even-tide, and as his

mother often pointed out with asperity, unlike the ‘pawtriarch’ to smoke before he went to roost, as the boyish-minded scholar and divine would privately call retiring to rest. To tell the truth, he did little else in the garden than stroll and meditate, hence the whiteness and softness of his hands with which Bruce Kirkpatrick found fault. He said he was too big and his back was too long for gardening, but that was an audacious pretence not worthy of the man. In reality, he had no early acquaintance, like what might have been enjoyed by a better-born minister, with such a garden as had now fallen to his lot, and though he delighted in it after the inner man, it was an ignorant delight, thus he did not take naturally to gardening like a duck to water.

It was a great uneclipsed pleasure for the minister to afford a comfortable home, superior to anything they had ever known, to his father, mother, and sister. It did not at this

time seriously interfere with the gratification that Mr. and Mrs. Baillie abused their privileges. Wat never said or even paused to think they did so, though he allowed to himself that his mother, with the best intentions in the world, was trying in some of her ways, which had to be resisted for her own sake as well as for his, where they interfered with positive duties. The resistance was not an agreeable exercise, but the minister went through it manfully as he did most of his battles, and forgot it as soon as possible. His father never set up an independent protest, while he was not the most enlightened and amusing companion, though his son would have been the last man to reproach him with the defect. Wat rather tried to be amusing on his side. As to enlightening his father, the son was never guilty of the presumption. Tammas Baillie might not be book-learned (he was grossly illiterate for a Scotchman who had attended a

good parish school in his youth), or possessed of great original sagacity (he was one of the dullest, most stupid men going—Wat and Rachie were certainly indebted for their brains, which had taken a new direction, to their mother), but the old man had known a thing or two before Wat was born, and might still be held by all reverent, single-hearted people to retain a vague but potential natural advantage and superiority, from that earlier start in being and primal relation, enough to cope successfully with all accidental arbitrary disadvantages and inferiorities. Wat honoured his father and mother against every obstacle which would have floored a flunkey or a man with the slightest strain of a cad in him, and he reaped the fruits of such honour. He was not a forecasting or foreboding man, so that he did not trouble himself with prudent anticipations and precautions against the days when there might be rival interests and claims in the manse, and the old couple's

presence there become a fertile source of strife and unhappiness.

Then where in all the world was there a sister, confidante, and companion like Rachie, who gave everything and exacted nothing, who had submitted to be trained for her post, and was proud and pleased to occupy it? What man was ever better off in a sister? Rachie proved his right hand and his left brain, his chaplain—as if he were a great church dignitary—treasurer, secretary, and the sharer of all his refreshments no less than of all his cares. For she not only read the ‘Nineteenth Century’ and the ‘Contemporary’ from beginning to end as light reading, but she could interpret the obscure verse of a tremendous Greek chorus, and disentangle the clue to a subtly inverted system of German philosophy, better than he could, he was always proudly boasting, in his fond estimation of her and loving depreciation of himself.

At unison, as far as weak fallible man may

be, with the mighty, infallible Author of his being, his Father in heaven and his elder Brother in the skies, at unison in the best sense with the world around him and with himself, doing his work diligently, hopefully, and humbly, having his pure, simple, intellectual tastes keenly gratified on all sides, we may well believe that Wat Baillie was one of the happiest men on earth during the first year of his settlement at Birkenbarns. To say there were drawbacks ; that he had also crosses, vexations, and mortifications ; that his patience was sorely tried occasionally, and his sense of justice and generosity sometimes grievously offended, is but to admit that he was still in this world, a mortal man, in a strange, perplexing, in some respects painfully contradictory and abnormal sphere.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN THE MANSE OF BIRKENBARNES.

WAT BAILIE was in the habit of rising with the lark in summer and long before the lark in winter. He had learnt the practice when he had not only to con his lessons at odd hours, but to save trouble still more than candles. In winter he kindled his own fire, and in both summer and winter he took his first breakfast of oat-cakes and milk without help. After his private prayers, of which we shall say nothing, seeing they were between him and his Master, he read Greek and Hebrew and the Fathers, as if he were studying for a professorship theological or secular, or with the purpose of entering

the public arena of learning and having a throw with some of the intellectual athletes. But in truth he had no wish or thought of ever applying for another post than that of the minister of Birkenbarns. He desired to grow old, to live and die in his first charge—always learning to know and love it better, always more fully qualified to slay dragons, speak the truth, gather in the harvest, and extend the kingdom of his Master. He would even have liked to become a benefactor in a temporal sense to his parish, like the good Swiss pastor Oberlin and the equally good Scotch minister Duncan. Apart from this he had little or no worldly ambition, which men of the type of Claud Kirkpatrick explained by the argument, correct so far as it went, that Wat Baillie, the son of the former griever of Rintoul, had already risen in the world by a long step when he became a placed parish minister, entitled to the high distinction of sometimes sitting—by no means on terms of

perfect equality—at lairds' tables and saying the grace there. And Wat had hardly so much as dreamt of contributing to contemporary literature—that channel by which men such as he are often naturally and blamelessly induced to widen their influence and increase their not too large incomes. Strange to say, Wat's income, like his office, was sufficient for him, while he smiled or laughed outright at the idea of fame. He had little more personal than worldly ambition, and was, perhaps, unassuming to a fault. He studied, as Hal of the Wynd fought, for his own hand, with the single motive of tilling, fertilising, and storing his own mind to the gain of his parishioners, who were nevertheless anything save scholars. They represented the agricultural interest in different estates—similar to the political chambers in constitutional countries. The members were a few lairds and many more farmers and ploughmen, with their womankind; not one of them—though

they had all advanced to more prosperity and polish—so thoroughly taught in the little they knew as the sons of the soil had been in Scotland two or three hundred years before. Wat Baillie studied for the love of study; but that love became, as it were, hallowed and reclaimed from selfishness by being broken in and yoked to the highest aim, so that study was rendered an everlasting joy to him.

At eight o'clock, when the sluggards of the world were still in bed, Wat, after having been hours in excellent company, ate a rather more liberal breakfast with his family. Even this was not exceptionally liberal, for Mrs. Baillie presided over it in more than pouring out the tea. She would no more have allowed the presence of coffee also on the table than she would have consented to introduce chocolate, or, what was worse, claret—the former she called a ‘nesty French supperflooity,’ the latter a ‘drucken-like fashion, fit only for repro-

bates who had been on the booze half the night, and risen with splitting head-aches and a craving for a hair of the dowg that had bitten them.' She permitted porridge and milk—the milk rather thin and blue in spite of the manse cow and dairy—and suffered Rachie to dispense them. For dainties there were tea and 'loaf bread' and fresh butter, with herrings, as a thrifty relish, judiciously varied on alternate days and according to the season of the year, by specimens of the fish in their 'saut,' 'reekit,' or 'spelded' conditions.

There was a tolerably well-stocked poultry yard among the manse offices, but never a new-laid egg appeared at the minister's table. Mrs. Baillie hunted the hens, ransacked their nests, and treasured their eggs as if these were the famous golden eggs of the great goose. If she did not convert them into gold, she transposed them, together with a large proportion of the butter secured from the manse cow,

into silver and copper, or payment in kind by barter with Sauchope tradesmen.

Mrs. Baillie looked on thrift as the cardinal Christian virtue, waste as the beginning of demoralisation and universal corruption. She was not able to see for herself, what she must have read in her Bible, that there was a giving which tended to increase, and a liberality that made rich. It passed her comprehension that the rigid, self-denying economy which might have been meritorious when it enabled her and her husband to rear Wat for an honourable office, and to enable Rachie to earn an honest livelihood, might in other circumstances degenerate into sheer grasping niggardliness. She was fully convinced that her mission—what she was at the Manse of Birkenbarns for—was to hold in Wat in his personal and family expenses, since she had found herself unable to restrain him in his considerable parish outlay. She had tried that also, for

she was a confident, unhesitating woman. She had interfered with his doles and his contributions to this or that charity ; but here she had met her master. She had found Wat as stubborn and immovable as the most hard to deal with of men. ‘No, mother, it is his or their due from me. She or they must have it. If you think I cannot afford it,’ returning to his gentle deference to her judgment and authority, ‘then we must manage that I give up something of my own. There must be plenty of things to give up, since you and Rachie take care that I am served like a prince’ (he was never farther from speaking in irony in his life). ‘But my debts to the Kirkenbarns people, and to every good cause I can help in the least, must be discharged.’

One of Mrs. Baillie’s principal grievances, where Wat’s private expenses were concerned, was that from the hour he entered on a living he was obliged by the laws of his church to

contribute to the ministers' widows' fund. Wat to provide for a widow! He who had never owned a wife, and need never own such a doubtful good so long as his mother or even Rachie was to the fore. It was a clear imposition and swindle. There was no use in seeking to explain that the compulsion was exercised for the good of the many—with the needy among the number—that the cares of harassed reverent heads of families might be lightened by the pittance for ministers' widows drawn in part from the inevitable contributions—clerical wags called them 'thank offerings'—of young and old bachelors and confirmed widowers. What had Wat Baillie to do with other men's widows? Let them work and spare, as Mrs. Baillie had done all her days; let their own husbands manage to lay up an aliment for them. Mrs. Baillie believed Wat to be a simple man in his cleverness and worth, and therefore the beggar's brother.

She had a certain amount of contempt for the son who was too practically good for her. She had an aggrieved rather than pained suspicion that his strict orthodoxy might be doubtful. Wat made too much work about the secularities. What did it signify if this man was poverty-stricken, and that woman worked to the bone, and these children shivering in rags with empty stomachs, if they got a good Gospel sermon to keep their souls in the right road? God had ordained different lots in life. Wat need not think to overturn time out of mind disparities of condition, which were the decrees of Providence. Wat put far too much weight and held forth too peremptorily on character and conduct, since the best works of righteousness were but filthy rags, and free grace was everything. We were all wicked and vile in God's sight, and deserved nothing save the outpouring of the vials of His wrath till we had accepted the scheme of redemption,

and then we were safe in covenant with Him. If anybody had told Mrs. Baillie that an apostle once cried God forbid he should say let men go on to sin that grace may still more abound, as ill-informed and impudent slanderers and liars pretended he had said, she would have indignantly asked you if you thought she did not know the Scriptures, and would have given you chapter and verse, as perhaps you could not have given her, for the apostle's statement. But her glib familiarity with the text did not prevent her and many of the same creed from unconsciously reiterating the charge with something like deliberate and determined approval.

At the same time, Mrs. Baillie would stand up, without altogether letting him know it, for her only son, who had so far done her and his father credit; would keep him right and save him from being ruined, as she was satisfied he would be without her.

There was one thing that could be said for

Kate Baillie. She was honourably consistent. She did not pinch other people in order to squander the gain on herself. She wore black caps to minimise the soap and time employed in washing, though she would have preferred white head-dresses, because the white set off better the lingering, somewhat hardly-moulded and ingrained personal attractions, in which she took secret, and Wat and Rachie took open, pride and pleasure. Her son and daughter, as well as her husband, whom she had trained to look up to her in every respect, regarded her as one of the handsomest women of her age in the country.

Mrs. Baillie allowed herself little more ease and comfort than she allowed Rachie in keeping at the heels of the single servant girl, who liked and respected her young master, and could have tolerated her old master and 'Miss,' but who entertained a lively detestation of her mistress, though she had been a former compa-

nion and friend of the girl's mother. ‘Sairey’ railed against Mrs. Baillie whenever she had the opportunity, as a hard task-mistress, who had not been accustomed to servants, so could not ask too much from them, a skinflint by nature and practice.

But Wat only recognised his mother's sincerity; and, giving her credit for the truest interest in his welfare, bore cheerfully with all her peculiarities, and was ready to resign at her word, without a murmur, indulgences to which he had been accustomed for years. He only stood fast when she encroached on his spiritual liberty, or threatened to assail the rights of his parishioners.

By this give-and-take system on the part of the master of the manse, it was possible for the household to get along, if not altogether smoothly still steadily, and on the whole very happily.

Wat, who had eaten *kedgeree*, devilled turkey, and the perfection of chops and kidneys

at rich men's tables, could content his healthy, temperate appetite with the changes rung on herrings. He even praised the fare without a grain of deceit. 'Your herrings are always so good, mother; I think it must be your mode of cooking,' he told her pleasantly, as he was helped a second time.

She condescended to be gratified by the filial tribute, and to show her gratification in the modified admission, 'Well, my man, it's a blessing you're pleased. A hantle men-folk are ill to please,' with an implied complaint against her submissive husband; 'that is, to judge by their taping' (carefully measuring out) 'their commendations. But onybody would be set up that found fault with sic weel faured, weel prepared fish.'

'There are as gude fish in the sea as ever cam out o't—eh, gudewife?' struck in the inobservant Tammas, with a dim notion that he was expected to contribute to the conversa-

tion, and with nothing more appropriate to say.

‘ You haverel ! is that all you ken ? ’ demanded his better half, scornfully ; for Mrs. Baillie was one of those persons who consider that the most unassailable Christianity may exist along with a supercilious mien, an arrogant will, and a mountain of self-conceit. ‘ Did you not hear me say the preparation of the fish was mair than half the making of them ? ’

‘ May be, my dear, may be, ’ assented Tammas hastily ; ‘ but I have no trock with preparation of fude ; it is not in my line. I leave that in gude hands. I may say, though, ’ lifting up his head, with a light coming into his pale blue eyes as he prepared to blow his own trumpet and assert his claim to superior wisdom, ‘ I ken something of the preparation o’ lan’. Wat, I have given orders for mair guanny to put upon the neep-field, and Phip Todd is to drive it from the station ; but I can spread it

best mysel' — if you dinna object' — looking around a little doubtfully — 'to my claes. But a glaff o' wind will set that richt; and if the thing is done proper, I'll beat you the field will ding every other in the paris'.'

'Gae wa' wi' you, Tammas Baillie,' Mrs. Baillie took the word out of her son's mouth and the law into her own hand. 'You'll do a hantle mair harm to your wearing appairel' (she was a small pedant in her way, and was partial to the use of 'long-nebbed' words when she indulged in an English phrase) 'than you'll do a grain gude to the sile by a' your clartin'. Div you think onybody's to sit in the room wi' you and your breeks, when they're fit to knock doon bees?'

'I think, father, if you direct Phip how to spread the guano it will come to much the same thing without offending my mother's nostrils,' said the minister with a laugh.

The old man muttered his dissent, but there

was no disputing the interdict, and peace was restored.

After breakfast the minister withdrew again to his study—his and Rachie's room, the best beloved by them in the manse, though, except for its well-filled bookcases, it was as bare and prosaic, as scoured free from any little tracery of fancy and feeling, as every other room in the house. Rachie had never been at liberty to employ her fingers in ornamental needlework; which, perhaps, was as well, for neither fingers nor taste had received any education, while their possessor had none of the intuitions of genius. Mrs. Baillie, whose spirit pervaded the material furniture of the house, objected to flowers—even cut flowers in a room—'as harbourers of dirt and trash of dropping leaves.' She had a still stronger dislike to domestic pets of every description, ranging from cats and dogs to birds. She applied extensively to them the adjective 'nesty,'—'nesty brutes,' or 'nesty

craitors, whether they were four-legged or feathered, ‘belonging to needless expense,’ ‘filling every hole and corner wi’ their banes or their seed, their hair or their “doons.”’ She cut away the roses and drove the wild birds from the window-sills; but it would not have entered her head, even if it had been in her power, to shut out the view of the Craig blooming profusely with its ever-hardy verdure, and dyed in nature’s dyes more exquisite than were ever furnished by Eastern loom. She did not value the Craig, she rather grudged its presence, considering that it shut out a wider view of the fields and distant houses—not that it supplied the loveliest epitome of the grand and the beautiful, the finest finish to the scene. But even her energy could not contemplate upheaving the solid obstacle, though she would have liked it well enough, if it had fallen in the way of road-makers or engineers, to be ‘blasted’ or bored through, or shattered into

rent, scarred, stripped fragments. Neither did Mrs. Baillie propose to stop the morning and evening orisons and the entire early summer-day's song of the birds, though she often complained that they ‘daved’ or deafened her with their idle noise. And she carried out vigorous raids—which Wat was sometimes guilty of circumventing—against the performers, by nets and snares of divers descriptions, on the plea of the birds' attacks, or aspirations when the marauders failed to attack, against the peas and currants.

But on the whole the study was not Mrs. Baillie's domain, and though she rarely allowed to others what she did not use herself, she could not deny it was a minister's perquisite and attribute, like an office to a writer, or a druggist's shop to a doctor. Wat was bound to have a study, so she permitted him to have it, and as she never installed herself in it, did not often enter it except to dust it severely now

and then, there was an air of freedom as well as of high converse about the room which was wanting from every other apartment in the house. There were present in the spirit, which was better than being there in the body, prophets and apostles, 'the holy army of martyrs.' The good, true, and wise of every age and clime, heathen philosophers and poets groping through their twilight darkness after truths hidden from Christians in the broad light of day. Saints and sages ; pleasant, kindly gossips, making the different centuries and generations god-sib by the speakers' frank, human talk ; men of science with their researches, brave and unflinching, calm and careful in the seekers' faith and humility, or bold and defiant with a constant tendency to rashness and dogmatism in the men's scepticism and scorn, because they had abandoned the secret of life in the act of pursuing it, and could never see the invisible God, whom they insisted on beholding with

the naked eyes of their senses or their intellect. There came profounder poets who could not doubt of a Creator and Preserver, because He had given them in a far-off, infinitesimal way a reflection of His power of creation, and because their imaginations bore them up, after a fashion, as the Everlasting Arms are represented supporting all flesh. There met German thinkers, French expounders, English interpreters between the two—all the goodly array, some splendid, some stately, some ponderous and crushing as iron, some fine and piercing as steel, some dry and musty, some bringing with them an atmosphere wholesome and glad, like that of the Craig to the youngest laddie in the parish when he ‘speiled’ it on a Saturday afternoon. And one and all did not refuse to keep company with Wat and, through him, with Rachie. The study in the Manse of Birkenbarns was a haunted place as benignly haunted as the studio of William Blake, the painter of his

generation, who grew beside himself with inspiration. ‘Don’t sit there,’ he cried to some intrusive visitor who was about to possess himself of one of the vacant shabby chairs; ‘don’t you see it is already occupied? Moses is sitting there.’ The Rev. Wat might have waived off a coveter of his ungenial horsehair and mahogany by the astounding piece of information, not the less true because the delivery of it would have set him down forthwith as a madman, that Shakespeare or Plato or Æsop or Paul or Job had been before the visitor.

But Wat did not go into his study after breakfast to study. He wrote his sermon there, doing it with the greatest thought and care as a discourse which would be delivered to immortals—albeit rustics, in the presence of their and his Master who had called him to preach the sermon—that is, to tell what he had learnt of God and the Son of God—to Wat’s fellow-men.

On the days when there was no sermon to write Wat was occupied with what may be called official work. He had a good deal to do. He had presbytery and synod meetings to attend. He liked the variety, and relished with what shrewdness and humour were in him, studying men at first hand in their speech and actions instead of in their writings, albeit this field was limited. Mild as he was, he had his share of combativeness, his cock's comb, and with all his thorough friendliness he experienced no great objection to coming into rousing collision as well as peaceful contact with his brethren, where some of his favourite theories and pet schemes were concerned, though he was apt in the presumption of his youth to think the details of many of the meetings and minutes rather small. He had benefit societies and classes of various kinds. He was claimed directly or indirectly by every description of board and commission, poor board,

school board, prison board, commission of lunacy, road trusteeship; for the minister, if not a recognised popular rural magistrate or justice, still had his finger for good or for evil in most magisterial pies. He had letters to write—many on his own account and many on behalf of others—and he strove to arrange all his engagements with method, which was not his forte, but which he knew to be necessary to the best discharge of his duty. It may appear that no great interests were at stake in the business of a country parish; indeed parochial often stands for what is petty, and a great public man may despise the stupid humdrum life of a buried-alive minister, which will only tend to prove that the great man after all is a small man, short-sighted withal. For the first principles which are of vital moment are at work everywhere for eyes that can see and control them. The human race and the world of nature are two important factors,

which, though they may vary in scale, are much the same all the universe over, whether they are found in courtly and parliamentary circles, and in mountain ranges and vast campaigns, or among a simple folk and in a few pastoral fields.

Wat baptised babies and married men and women on occasions, besides receiving many privileged visitors in that study. But these visitors seldom came in the morning. They were working people mostly, who attended at Wat's levees, and these as a rule were held in the earlier part of evenings set apart for the purpose. But at all times, and in all circumstances, the Manse was free to the parishioners, for Wat was their minister, on the spot, save during the couple of weeks commonly known in Scotland as the length of a minister's holiday, to listen to his people and serve them if he could. Above all, he knew them intimately every one, for without

that knowledge which should represent—however faintly and at whatever immeasurable distance—the unerring wisdom and sympathy of Him who knows what is in man, Wat could not have the smallest hope of helping effectually one of the number.

The arrival of the post was the great event of the day at Birkenbarns, bringing with it a multitude of the most heterogeneous despatches for the minister—the public news contained in the daily paper, in which, like every true man, he took an intense interest, and not infrequently a new book, too rare or special for the reading club, enough of a pamphlet in form to be cut out for postal conveyance, not too dear for a minister's purse, though always looked at askance by Mrs. Baillie in the light of a purchase which was a folly verging on a sin in the minister. As if he had not enough books already, as if books were the root of the matter, and not a temptation to trust in carnal

learning; a waste of Rachie's time, though that was little matter by comparison, as well as of Wat's own.

At the mid-day dinner Mrs. Baillie and her husband took the head and foot of the table in the manner complained of by the public, and Wat supped his broth and ate his pork, or his scrag of mutton, or his lean rabbit, or his tough old cock at the side, like Rachie, in manfulness, meekness, and thankfulness.

The afternoon was the time set apart for the minister's 'visiting,' a kind of visiting peculiar to his office, and as distinct from ordinary calling as the feast of the halt and the blind, recommended by the great Master of such feasts, is apart from ordinary dinners. Wat's parish was not very large, but it was never unprovided with poor people, sick and bed-ridden men and women, folk in worldly trouble, in sore bereavement, in mental distress. These sufferers might and generally did dwell miles

apart, so that to take them in turn by a minister who did not keep a horse, involved an amount of constant bodily exercise which rendered athletic sports, on the plea of health, unnecessary. Of course Wat had his walks and visits for mere pleasure also—walks to the neighbouring manses in the exchange of friendly sociality; walks to some place of archæological, geological, botanical, or ornithological interest in the neighbourhood; walks to the town for a later newspaper or a fresh book. In both descriptions of walk—professional or private—Wat, who was eminently companionable, rejoiced when Rachie went with him. But Mrs. Baillie thought walking, if it could be avoided, a waste of time for men, and especially for women. Wat was obliged to walk in the course of his visits, and that was some excuse for the wearing out of his boot-soles; but Rachie ought, like her mother, to have enough of walking in going

up and down and to and fro in the house, the dairy, the offices, and the garden, maintaining a perpetual cleaning, and taking care that nothing was wasted. Tea was a regular meal for which all the family assembled as unfailingly and with as serious interest as for the early dinner. It made the nearest approach to a luxurious meal of any in the Manse, since the most austere conformers to a narrow rule have generally one point of relaxation. Mrs. Baillie yielded a little to fleshly appetite in brewing good tea, in permitting a choice of scones, oat cakes—nay, even buttered toast in winter, with the clear superfluities of cheese, honey, and preserves—to appear without censure on the festal board. And the talk round the tea-table, as if it were affected by these indulgent conditions, waxed freer and livelier. The day's experience and the parish news were discussed and enlarged upon with comfortable leisureliness of detail, for there was no more

hurry on account of the day's work, which was nearly over. Family jokes were permitted. Mrs. Baillie, if she happened to be in a gracious mood, would crack pungent jokes on her own account, to the admiration and enlivenment of the whole company.

After tea Wat gave his receptions, or strolled out for some comparatively near-at-hand, easy, only semi-professional visits, or to look in on some special cronies. In these he had a double reward. He felt the salutary satisfaction which every conscientious man or woman must feel in an honest attempt at the fulfilment of duty—marred, as it must always be, by human weakness; and he had the genuine pleasure which every student of character cannot fail to experience, on each opportunity for fresh analysis, in all the new curious traits of mind and will, pathos and humour, he was for ever coming across. For a rural parish, even more than a great city, is full of strongly,

quaintly-marked characters to those who can appreciate such, and Wat loved to make their acquaintance and to derive wider sagacity together with blither amusement from them, as from his books.

At eight o'clock Rachie brought forward the Books, and the servant girl entered and sat down near the other members of the family that they might worship God in their household relation. No doubt Mrs. Baillie would have liked that she, in the person of her husband, should continue to preside over this act also. But after a struggle she had yielded her supremacy, and summoned Wat to fill the arm-chair at the head of the table, when, being called, he had answered to the call. Tammas Baillie's stanchest backer on all occasions could not say that he had a gift of extempore prayer, while, after all, Wat was the minister in his own Manse, and some respect was due to him in that light, though his mother would have de-

clined absolutely to grant to him or any other minister—even to John Knox himself—the right of a priest in guiding her devotions.

The supper was a light informal repast, consisting generally of potatoes and the ubiquitous herrings, a crab to pick when the fish-wife brought shell-fish inland in her creel, hard biscuits or ‘water bakes,’ which demanded a hatchet rather than human hands or teeth to break them, porridge, butter-milk, the thinnest and fizziest of beer (Carlyle’s ‘swats’), and a tumbler of toddy, which Wat concocted expressly for his father, considering that the old man required the stimulant.

Of course every day and night was not alike. There were changes and interludes constantly occurring, but these were mostly changes rung on the same round of tasks, and recreations, with interludes similar in style to the main events in the lives of the family group. Wat would have his elders to dinner

on the Monday after a sacrament Sunday. He would assist in 'serving the tables' at some neighbouring sacrament, and dine out in his turn. He would give his Sabbath scholars tea, and work a magic lantern for their delectation. He would deliver lectures in the course of popular lectures, or preside at the penny readings in the towns and villages round.

In the winter evenings, when Tammas Baillie's narratives of what he had done with land became particularly prosy, and irritated his wife till she looked up from the stocking she was knitting or darning to nag at him unmercifully, Wat would induce his father to play draughts with him. Scotch peasants have an addiction to draughts, and take pride in their skill in the game in emulation of the 'herd-laddie,' who was the champion draught-player of Scotland. Their acquaintance with cards is much more superficial, and rarely goes beyond 'Birkie' and 'Catch the Ten.'

Besides, such acquaintance belongs to a different type and age, and is for the most part loftily abjured by soberly inclined, elderly working men. Not only were the refined and intellectual mysteries of whist utterly unknown to the inhabitants of the Manse of Birkenbarns, save to the minister himself, who had mastered them as a tutor sometimes required to obviate the use of a dummy—if cards had been introduced in this quarter the pack would have been at once sternly stigmatised by Mrs. Baillie as ‘devil’s books,’ relentlessly confiscated, and in their glossy and spotless newness flung at the back of the fire, as surely as the ‘painted masks,’ embroidered veils, and scented gloves, the artists’ free sketches, and the idle story-books were piled into heaps in the Florentine streets and sentenced to pass away in smoke and ashes, at the consuming word of Savonarola.

Summer or winter, in the morning or in

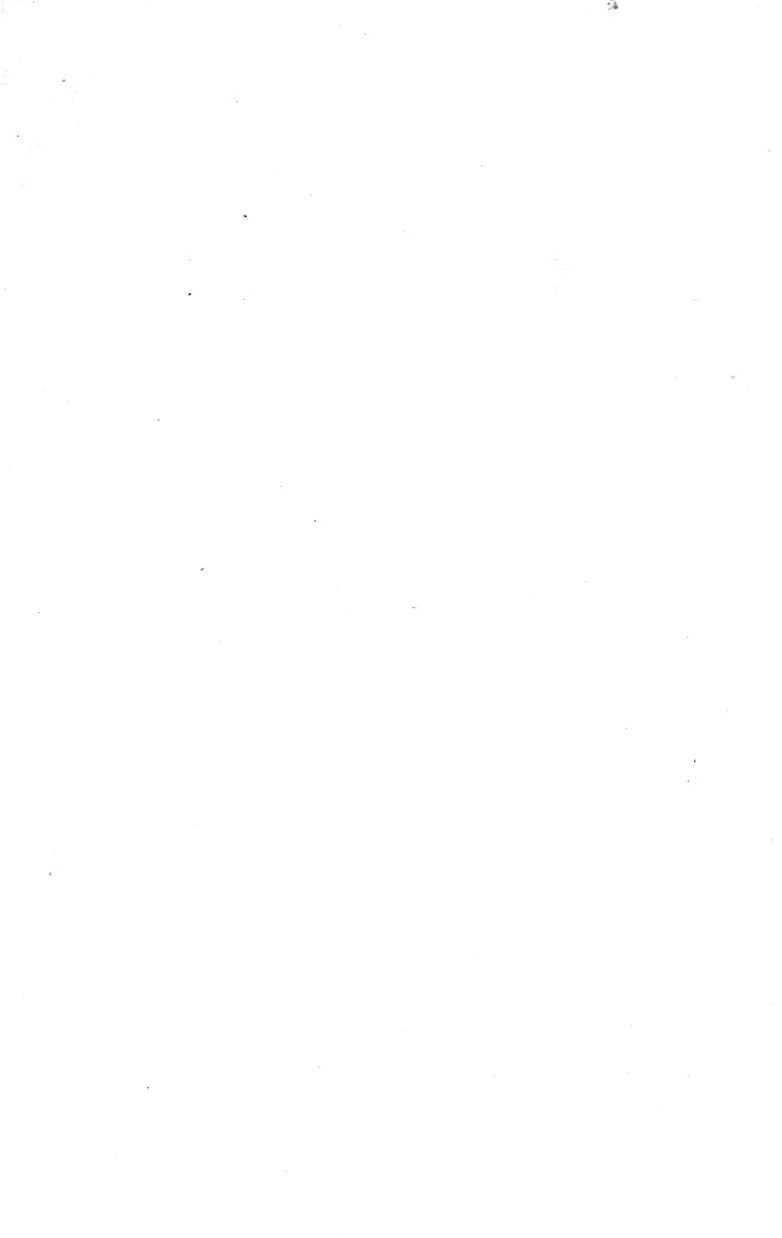
the evening, or on rainy afternoons, Wat and Rachie always contrived that they should spend some time together over their books, while she brought her seam into the study and he read to her, or she read to him, and he, lying back in his not particularly easy chair, with his hands clasped above his head and his legs crossed, listened, stopping her frequently by his eager remarks and vivid illustrations.

Life was very frugal at the Manse of Birkenbarns, a good deal more frugal than it need have been, or than it was in other manses where the occupants had been born to such small preferment as had fallen to their share, and had not risen in the social scale. For in the last case one of two opposite results is very apt to ensue—unnecessary thrift degenerating into meanness provokes hostility, scorn, and ridicule, or unnecessary ignorant lavishness leads swiftly to debt and disgrace. The Birkenbarns Manse life could hardly have been more

frugal though it had been led in a fairly well-to-do, self-respecting, working man's household. But it was also a wonderfully full life brimming over for two of those who shared it, with honourable duties, kindly acts to relations, and even exquisite enjoyments.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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